

# **Jews and Judaism in Modern China**

**M. Avrum Ehrlich**



Routledge Jewish Studies Series

# Jews and Judaism in Modern China

*Jews and Judaism in Modern China* explores and compares the dynamics at work in two of the oldest – and starkly contrasting – intact civilizations on earth: Jewish and Chinese. The book studies how they interact in modernity and how each views the other, and analyzes areas of cooperation between scholars, activists and politicians. Through evaluation of the respective talents, qualities and social assets that are fused and borrowed in the socio-economic, intellectual and cultural exchanges, we gain an insight into the social processes underpinning two dissimilar and long-surviving civilizations.

Identifying and analyzing some of the emerging current issues, this book suggests that Jewish–Chinese relations may become a growing discipline of importance to the study of religion and comparative identity, and looks at how the significant contrasts in Jewish and Chinese national constructs may serve them well in the quest for a meaningful discourse. Chapters explore identity, integrity of the family unit, minority status, religious freedom, ethics and morality, tradition versus modernity, the environment, and other areas which are undergoing profound transformation.

Identifying the intellectual and practical nexus and bifurcation between the two cultures, worldviews and identities, this work is indispensable for students of Chinese Studies, sociology, religion and the Jewish Diaspora, and provides useful reading for Western tourists to China.

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**Jews and Judaism in Modern China**

*M. Avrum Ehrlich*



# **Jews and Judaism in Modern China**

**M. Avrum Ehrlich**

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Chinese salaries are somewhat modest, and the ability to understand Chinese life in all its forms, and to take advantage of my time to travel, research, participate in and traverse as many areas, regions, classes and fields of the Chinese experience as possible, required financial means for which I am grateful to my parents, Professor Frederick and Shirley Rose Ehrlich, for steadfastly ensuring I never lacked. It is the largess of their support that allowed me to maximize my time in China and to ensure, when not off the beaten track, an uncompromisingly high quality of life. Their continued interest in my activities, visits to China, travels with me to regions of interest, and steadfast support on matters big and small will be with me as a rock for ever.

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# Introduction to modern Jewish–Chinese relations

As we shall see in the pages of this book, Jewish–Chinese Relations is an emerging discipline with fascinating facets illuminating inquiries into comparative civilization, philosophy, politics and religion.

It was my intention in *Jews and Judaism in Modern China* to cover the main areas of Jewish–Chinese interaction in modernity, but owing to various arbitrary limitations, and to a multitude of new ideas and fields of relevance which occurred to me as I wrote, it now appears that this goal will take more time and more volumes to achieve. Though touched on by way of introduction, a series of new subjects now present themselves as deserving more thorough investigation.

They include the areas where Jewish civilization, Jews and Judaism contribute to and interact with Confucianism, Marxism, and the variety of challenges facing modern China – the integrity of the family unit, human rights, minority status, religious freedom, ethics and morality, the often opposing forces of tradition *vs* modernity, the environment and other areas that are undergoing profound transformation. Treated within the crucible of Jewish history and thought, but often using polar conceptions and antithetical intellectual techniques for redress, the Jewish perspective can both contribute to and also learn from the Chinese perspective. These perspectives may converge to generate synthesized models and insightful social theory for the twenty-first century. It is towards this end that future volumes and, to some extent, the present volume are directed.

The subject of religion in China presents many unique opportunities to understand religious dynamics. Chinese society developed without many of the stimuli and processes common in the West, and without monotheistic or biblical influences; so the opportunity to observe how certain ideas affect Chinese society and how certain combinations and fusions of ideas succeed in dominating the social landscape affords much insight into the study of religion and civilization. Because of its axial status in the formation of Christianity and Islam, and its role within Western cultural development, the dynamics of Judaism can be better understood when compared and contrasted to Chinese models. The reasons why Confucianism in particular precluded the need for typical religious conduct as we know it in the West are of special interest.

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I have long been fascinated by the role of messianism in the transformation of society and have hypothesized in other works that messianism is commonly used by societies to trigger change and render archaic and obsolete social paradigms open for re-fertilization with new ideas. We remain unsure to what extent messianism previously existed in China, if at all. Certain Chinese religions, cults and ideologies at the fringes of and underlying Chinese social and political life are worthy of comparison with Jewish messianic and social iconoclastic movements, to identify them more closely and compare the dynamics. I have begun a study of religions in China for this purpose, and some discussion herein serves as an entrée.

Comparisons between Jewish and Chinese festivals, calendars and rituals also have fascinating dimensions, especially as the Hebrew and Chinese calendars share many of the same intercalating techniques and milestones of the agricultural year marked by concurrent lunar and solar festivals. These suggest parallel development in aspects of the cultural and symbolic worlds of the two societies and point to the existence of similar sentiments, as they respond to events of the lunar and solar cycles. The way that tradition and modernity merge and form a national consensus is fascinating in itself; the availability of two different and polar examples of how tradition is woven into the administering of national and cultural identity presents many insights for the sociologist and philosophers of society.

Another area of fascination is the personal stories of Jews who have lived and worked in China over the past decades until the present. A similar subject has been dealt with in a chapter of another volume I edited, entitled *The Jewish–Chinese Nexus: A Meeting of Civilizations* (Routledge 2008) which relates to Jewish people from former generations. The present generation of Jews in China is equally riveting and includes rabbis, entrepreneurs, business people, professionals, academics, travelers and journalists who have lived in China for years, and have observed and contributed to processes which may only reach maturation in decades to come. Their life-stories are illustrative of the interaction between Jews and Chinese, often telling rare and epic stories. Surveying some of them is a necessary component of the discipline in formation.

As the Jewish communities of China grow, Jewish individuals will invariably achieve prominence in a variety of spheres, professions and industries; their observations of these endeavors are insightful, their personal contributions to them often landmark, bringing Western and Jewish perspectives to the fore of Chinese life. Examples include the establishment of major private hospitals in Beijing and Shanghai by long-time Jewish residents (and Jewish community leaders) of Ms Roberta Lipson and Ms Eliza Silverstein, and also the attempt to implement a six-day week and a compulsory weekend (Sabbath) in his factories by Jewish industrialist Harold Lerner. The implementation of a cessation of work on the Sabbath is complicated in the Chinese context and has far-reaching administrative, financial and social implications. Similarly, in Guangzhou, where a sizable Israeli and Jewish contingent live,

many shops and small factories close on festivals and on the Sabbath. Jewish involvement in improving work ethic practices, often to the dismay of Chinese workers who do not understand or identify with the ethic of rest and prefer to receive more wages, is no less than tantalizing and could have implications well into China's future. I discuss another example of this in the current volume relating to the kosher food industry in China.

Another area needing more attention is the relations between Israelis and Chinese. This assumes many forms, including identifying and realizing Israeli and Jewish interests and policies in China, the machinations of the Israeli embassy, consulates, and culture and trade missions, and the formation of the Israeli China Chamber of Commerce and other organizations to represent, lobby and implement Israeli and Jewish interests.

Conversely there is the growing phenomenon of Chinese in Israel, working as professionals and as manual laborers. The increasing awareness of each other and of disparate of language and culture is not always edifying as Chinese workers complain of unfair treatment and of women forced into prostitution. The effects of modern Chinese–Jewish relations, the realities and ideals, requires further exploration.

Academic, cultural and professional collaboration between Jews and Chinese is growing as scholars and professionals from a broad range of fields – science, engineering, agriculture, archeology, politics, economics, law, cinema and art – increasingly travel back and forth. The intellectual and creative synergy between the two nations is compelling.

Another phenomenon of interest and worthy of investigation is the disproportionate numbers of Jews who visit China as tourists, or who return to visit graves or explore their roots, and the general fascination many Jews have for Chinese civilization. There are several salient features of this phenomenon which require explanation. Owing to the influence of some of these tourists, a cultural bridge is in continual formation, with far-reaching implications.

The question of the status of foreigners in China is likely to become topical in the coming years as tens of thousands of expatriates who have lived for years, if not decades, in major Chinese cities will come to expect the same fair representation and rights as immigrants in other countries. As their children are born and grow up in China, study in Chinese educational settings and speak Chinese, this issue becomes even more pressing. Jews are inexorably linked to this issue owing to their heightened sensitivity to the struggle for minority rights, and to the Jewish community's cohesion and experience in representing its special needs vis-à-vis government officials. Because of their diversity, multinational and multicultural representation, and ability to bring the pressure of international networks to bear on Chinese officials, Jews and Jewish groups may find themselves championing the wider interests of the wider expatriate community in China. Of special concern is the question of the legalization of Judaism in China, which has not yet been addressed but seems it cannot continue for much longer without



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redress. Hence the status of Jews in China continues to accompany many of the major rites of passage of Chinese modernization and integration into the world community.

The growing incidence of mixed Jewish–Chinese identities is also of interest. Inter-marriage between Jews and Chinese (and the maturing of offspring within Jewish educational settings), significant numbers of Chinese conversions to Judaism (including the high-profile congressional hopeful Hank Eng), large numbers of Chinese girls adopted by Jewish families who are now coming of age, Chinese living in Israel and collaborating with Jews in a range of pursuits, Jews living in China and being immersed in Chinese language and culture have all contributed to a burgeoning Jewish–Chinese identity. The manner in which these phenomena will increasingly inform Jewish Studies in China and the issue of the Jewish descendants of Kaifeng are also of great interest.

The rehabilitation of the Jewish community in Kaifeng is a work in progress. Some of the younger members of the old-new community are working hard to develop Hebrew-language skills, deepen their commitment to Jewish tradition, and build ties with Jews in China and around the world. Their efforts to put in motion a recovery plan and take advantage of economic opportunities to extricate themselves from dire poverty may be significant in their re-conjoining with the wider Jewish world. The ability of international Jewish bodies to collaborate with them and assist these efforts opens up vistas for new and far-reaching areas of Jewish–Chinese relations. The question of how Jewish organizations perceive this community – not formally recognized as Jews – is of interest; the question whether to help and how to help is challenging Jewish communal conceptions. The question of whether they will be recognized as Jews for the purpose of emigration to Israel under the Right of Return Act is also fraught with challenges.

The above topics, though not dealt with directly, inform the discussion and interests within the chapters and sections of the present volume. The work is divided as follows: “Chinese perceptions of Jews”, which introduces the general impressions Chinese have of Jews; “Food, identity, Jews and Chinese”, which ostensibly deals with a comparison of food and eating habits but actually tries to identify the underlying dynamics of the respective cultures; “The kosher industry in China”, which relates to a growing Jewish industry in some of the distant provinces of China with the potential to overhaul Jewish dynamics there – kosher supervision in factories in countries around the world has mobilized many religious Jews to emigrate, which, if it happened, would change the dynamics of Jewish community life in China; “Jewish Studies in China”, and is a major chapter that discusses the growing phenomenon in its entirety and is a summary of the last four years I have spent teaching Jewish philosophy at Shandong University – there are many factors involved in the subject, and this section lays the groundwork for other cultural and intellectual discourse and relations between the two peoples; and “Diaspora, identity and relationship with the homeland”,

which discusses another important aspect of Chinese–Jewish collaboration and intellectual exchange and in which two antithetical perspectives of civilization are discussed and synthesized – an important area of research which I hope is duly recognized. Finally, I have included a bibliography of Jewish-related books, articles and blogs in the Chinese language. Frequently requested to furnish book titles and references of Chinese writing about Judaism, I have provided an exhaustive list of books and articles in the Chinese language, intended as a resource and reference for non-Chinese scholars wishing to deepen their understanding of/research into this field. It ranges from the most popular titles to the most academic. I hope it will be useful.

I would be pleased to hear from scholars and activists who have information and/or who have dealings in the above-mentioned fields. I look forward to continued collaboration with Jewish and Chinese scholars in the future – a time when, no doubt, the nexus between Jews, Chinese and modernity will have burgeoned and blossomed.

# 1 Chinese perceptions of Jews

Regardless of the venue – in a cab, at a restaurant or bar, at a meeting, in conversation across the spectrum from high-level officials to villagers and farm folk alike – a surprisingly high number of people in China will have heard about “Jews” (Chinese: *yutairen*). Most will respond that “the Jews” are clever and good at business, and that these attributes are good. Generally, Jewish people are respected. There are few negative things said; and, if anything, it is usually surrounding the Israeli–Arab conflict, with the differences between Jews and Israelis blurred and confused. On occasion, observations that echo Christian/European sentiments are expressed; but, for the most part, the cultural and theological underpinnings of European anti-Semitism are not understood, have no appeal, and do not resonate within Chinese culture.

## Snapshot impressions

In his 2004 strategy paper on Chinese and Jews, Saloman Wald quotes a survey of Chinese students who responded to questions about the Jewish people.<sup>1</sup> The following are some of the responses: “a brave nation”, “Let the friendship of our two nations extend from generation to generation”, “for anyone who shall attack Israel again, let them become pigs! Let their families become pigs”, “The Jewish nation is worthy of our sympathy! Support the Jewish people”.

These strong votes of confidence in Israel and the Jews are surprising considering that, a decade earlier, China and Israel did not share diplomatic relations. Either China’s diplomatic overtures were in response to the natural friendship towards the Jews and sympathy to Israel; or, as a result of diplomatic relations, government media have endorsed positive reports.

There are also negative views of Jews emanating primarily from Islamic enclaves and motivated by their radicalization, but this subject is beyond the immediate scope of our work.<sup>2</sup>

Snippets of responses recorded by Wald of students who took an introductory course in Jewish Studies include: “Long history of persecution”, “strong family values”, “education values”, “networks of friends”, “chosen by God”, “[Jews] don’t missionize”, “originators of the Bible”, “an ancient civilization”, “very

religious”, “founders of monotheism”, “don’t believe in Jesus”, “do believe in Jesus”, “enemies of other religions”, “many famous people are Jews”, “Einstein, Freud, Marx were Jews”, “Most believe in Islam”, “There is a Jewish version of the Bible”, “very clever” and “very rich”.<sup>3</sup> These were recorded in 2004. Since then, dozens or perhaps hundreds of books, articles and documentaries have come out and catalyzed these opinions.

In a *Washington Post* article in April 2007, Ariana Eunjung Cha surveyed some of the superficial perceptions of Jews in popular Chinese literature and the media.<sup>4</sup> She listed some of the “self-help” and “make it rich” literature attributed to Jewish wisdom which has given the Jewish communities in China and Jews in general “iconic status in the eyes of the Chinese public”. They include: *The Eight Most Valuable Business Secrets of the Jewish*, *The Legend of Jewish Wealth*, *Jewish People and Business: The Bible of How to Live Their Lives*.<sup>5</sup> She notes that “Many of these sell upward of 30,000 copies a year and are thought of in the same inspirational way as many Americans view the ‘Chicken Soup for the Soul’ series”. The interest in “Jewish Fever” as described in more detail in another chapter of this book has extended to the pages of January’s *Shanghai and Hong Kong Economy* magazine with a front cover with the title “Where does Jewish people’s wisdom come from?” and to Chinese business requests to invite Jewish entrepreneurs to give seminars on how to make money “the Jewish way”. A media outlet even invited a Jewish businessman and his family on to a popular television show, following them around with a camera to see how they ate and how they ran their lives.<sup>6</sup>

Even in Chinese academic circles, the impressions of Jews continue to be in step with broad and superficial generalizations about race, culture and religion, which is unacceptable in contemporary Western intellectual etiquette, as it is believed that these have sometimes formed the basis for anti-Semitic campaigns in the West.<sup>7</sup> In China they are believed to be, at worst, harmless musings about world cultures.

## Survey of impressions

To get a better picture of the attitude of Chinese people towards Jewish people, I conducted a number of my own surveys, questionnaires and interviews over several years living in China, and present some of the responses below. The respondents were primarily quite educated people, university students or students at colleges or academies, and hailed from diverse provinces and from both urban and rural locales, geographically far-flung: Yunnan in the south, Shandong in the central eastern area, Beijing in the northeast, Hubei in the center of the country, representing a broad range of views within the still-vague parameters of an emerging middle class, the new face of China comprised of the children of farmers, merchants, professionals and elites – the groups that have come to reap the rewards of the ever-expanding cycle of increased economic growth, higher levels of education, greater opportunity and entrepreneurial endeavor, and children of high government officials. The bulk of the data-gathering took place in Shandong

Province, a region where people represent the basic and most deeply entrenched cultural mors of traditional China. Interviewing peasants and farmers, the majority of whom have little or no formal education, is a bit more tricky as their knowledge of world affairs is rudimentary, but what I have generally discovered is that those who do know anything at all invariably have something positive to say – an observation from the simplest and least-informed Chinese person, typically a farmer or villager, will be along the lines of “Jew? The Jews are clever!”. These quite obviously are conclusions drawn without any first-hand knowledge to substantiate them, but they none the less indicate that perceptions of Jews are sufficiently strong to have permeated even the backwaters of a country still in relative ignorance about distant cultures.

One of the written surveys I embarked upon in 2005 by way of research for a forthcoming book, *A Philosopher's Observations of Modern China*, sought to identify general ethical and cultural predilections amongst young Chinese people aged 18–22, and to understand trends in national and religious identity, discrimination, ethics and attitude to culture. Some of the findings are discussed herein, the most relevant being preferences for some nationalities over others. The assumptions that hatred for Japanese people is very commonplace, and that Chinese people are suspicious but respectful (and perhaps envious) of the United States, appeared to be confirmed in this survey. That they admire the Jews greatly without any vestiges of jealousy or bitterness was also apparent in the replies of large numbers of respondents singing high and free praise. The unreserved respect for Jews juxtaposed against the more restrained, but generally positive, views of Americans raises a number of curious questions which will be discussed below.

I hoped to clarify some of these points in a second set of surveys focusing on the attitudes of Chinese students in particular towards Jews. Respondents to these surveys were from a range of institutions and forums: students of philosophy and of religion at Shandong University; graduate students from a number of Chinese universities who participated at a summer school in Jewish Studies in 2005; students chosen randomly from schools around Jinan city; and participants in a Hyde Park Corner type of open discussion arena which took place in Jinan city on Sunday mornings where I would incite debate about identity in a general sense, and would specifically raise issues relating to the Jewish people and to Israel.

The following are some of the responses to questions posed to students in a “Jewish people and culture” course I delivered. I asked some questions before the start of the program and others afterwards – questions such as: What do you know about Jews? What do you believe to be the most important elements, beliefs and principles of Judaism? What do you find interesting about the Hebrew Bible and do you think that it has any relevance to Chinese life, religion, language, culture and development? Do you think Jewish ideas and civilization is an important subject to learn about? What topics covered in the course do you consider to be most important?

The comments of respondents recorded below fall into two major groups. The first group was comprised of general students and people “in the street” randomly chosen, and their replies represent popular attitudes shaped by the media and the respondents’ own particular biases, values and so forth formed as a result of upbringing, community views, peer influence and so on. The second group was comprised of students whose ideas were formed and/or refined after having attended lectures about Jews and Judaism and after lengthy discussions and inquiry.

### **Observing them observing you: impressions of Chinese culture via impressions of Jews**

In many cases the observations noted below were aired in the context of discussion, or were echoed by many people suggesting a distinct group attitude. I have added analysis to the comments so as to observe some features of Chinese culture in response to their observations of Jews.

Jews have a very long history, like the Chinese.

It is very often the case that any praise afforded to Jews (and others) is self-referential. For example, they may say: “The Jews have an ancient history like the Chinese”, “the Jews are clever like the Chinese”, “the Jews suffered like the Chinese”, “the Jews are good in business like the Chinese”. Only rarely is praise given freely, without the will to share the credit or to reference the praise towards themselves. The conclusions drawn from this observation include the possibility that praise for “the Jews” reflects an image of what the respondents would like to be or what they think they are, with the symbol of the “Jews” merely serving as an image of their hopes and ambitions.

Since Judaism and Chinese culture are totally different, we Chinese can learn a lot through comparison. Both Jews and Chinese have made great contributions to our world, they both created many splendid accomplishments in language, customs, culture and many other aspects, they are both part of the treasure of the human psyche.

Chinese and Jews have a lot of common ground: the two have a glorious history, defend stubbornly their cultural tradition, industrious endeavors, rich in wisdom, most importantly they have unfortunate and bitter experiences, being pushed aside, discrimination and persecution. These two nationalities make very big contributions to humanity. Although they have many differences they should become friends and not enemies.

Empathy and identity and friendship emerge from the sense that there is both similarities and much to learn from the Jews.

Before attending class I just knew from books and newspapers that the Jews are very wise and good at business, and that they treasure knowledge. As for Judaism, I knew very little. Today I still believe that the Jews

are wise and that they like to think. It seems that the principles and laws are of utmost importance because the principles keep the beliefs.

Chinese students who study Judaism seem to be particularly struck (not necessarily in a positive way) by the strictness of Jewish religion and the role of law and principles in the management of Jewish life. This reference to “principles” confounds them and suggests fundamentally different axes around which Chinese life and society revolves.

I know that the Jews are the people chosen by God long ago. They are very clever. They lived in Israel in ancient times but now they live everywhere.

Chinese students commonly speak about God or even refer to God as an entity that should be respected and revered whilst simultaneously saying they are non-believers. Their ability to respect and “give face” to many religious and superstitious traditions is born of the polytheistic culture and plethora of family-based deities, which breeds a liberal, non-exclusive deference to all. This is a cognitive dissonance that some Westerners may have difficulty reconciling. Belief in God has wide-ranging implications for the thought processes and behavior of Westerners. In the West, atheists do not refer to God nonchalantly as the subject animates much of their intellectual machinations. Chinese, however, do not generally refer to God in this way; they have not been brought up with literary and social references to a single monotheistic, biblical God, and it does not serve as an important axiomatic principle in their lives. They treat the subject with equanimity and are apparently not at all perplexed by discussing or referring to it, or even praying or paying ritual respect if convenient to do so. But they do so with casual nonchalance, such as to imply indifference to the exclusive demands of the biblical God.

About Israel I know little and don’t want to answer the question.

Chinese students are still reluctant to voice criticism, an enduring consequence of the Cultural Revolution and fear of the authorities. As they are also eager to find positive things to say and give honor and “face” to their superiors, they will rarely directly criticize. This student had possibly heard negative things about Israel and did not know how to reconcile it with the request to give honest and, if necessary, critical responses, so he preferred to not answer.<sup>8</sup>

I have always thought that the Jews are very clever, humorous and strong.

In the eyes of most Chinese, the Jews are very smart. They have wit, humor and are good at business.

Jewish people are all good at trading so they are rich, both mentality and materially. I think it’s related to their diligence, maybe many of them are born geniuses, I guess.

Jewish people are smart. Sometimes they are selfish, they are good at business. Israel, in West of Asia, is their homeland. Studying Judaism can help us understand philosophy and bible. Jews are interesting because they are smart and have good talking skills.

Generalizations come easily to Chinese, perhaps related to the pictographic–iconographic nature of the Chinese character system, which depicts an image by its overt features; and, even as time passes and the features depicted are no longer relevant, the characters remain the same and are still recognized. Chinese still view themselves in national not individual terms. They are deeply patriotic and prone to view others, at least at first, in terms of their national characteristics instead of their individual ones. Projecting features and typical behaviors according to national belonging does not seem to them inaccurate or errant. Even the race to become rich, so passionately embraced by so many, is not justified entirely as a personal/individual pursuit. Endorsed by the government as a national service, it has become the nexus between national and personal interests, which may be one of the reasons why the government is tolerated, despite its other flaws. It also may be a reason why they view wealth as a national characteristic.

It is said that the world's money is in the hands of the US, the US money is in the hands of the Jews, therefore like the majority of people, I think that the Jews have economic minds.

There are many famous nations in the world, but I think the Jews are the most special. Obviously Jews are the cleverest, the richest and they almost control the economy of America, even of the world, like Rockefeller and Buffet. After WWII Jews escaped to America and it resulted that most scientists awarded the Nobel Prize are American Jews.

As it happens, the student was mistaken about Rockefeller and Buffet being Jewish, but none the less it explains a most curious inclination amongst some respondents to explain America's success as being because of the Jews and not in its own right. This may be a subconscious attempt to alleviate Chinese embarrassment at not being as "successful".

The good things about the Jews are that they are still strong after so many disasters, they do well in business. The bad thing is that they don't accept other people from different culture.

From some books I got an impression of the Jews which was not so good. I thought they were anti-foreign to some extent. They were too close to each other and reject others who try to enter their circle. They separate themselves from people who are not in the same community. However I also thought these people are very clever and good in many fields, such as commerce.

They are rich and united but they are exclusive and not for other people. They have great wisdom but don't want to tell other people about it.



The perception that Jews are exclusive and secretive or protective about their wisdom and spiritual assets, that they are too close-knit and non-accepting of others, is a curious comment. It seems to refer to the non-evangelism policy of Judaism, which while alleviating the fears of the Chinese authorities, who have allowed Jewish communities and Jewish Studies to grow in China, seems paradoxically to offend students who believe that they should be entitled to participate in any group or knowledge base they wish. I questioned the students about this point and asked whether I or any other foreigner could ever become a Chinese citizen. They responded that this would be impossible.<sup>9</sup> I pushed the point: what if my Chinese was fluent, if I married a Chinese person, if I lived in China for forty years, if I contributed greatly to China economically and/or socially, and if I knew the customs and habits of Chinese? The entire class responded that it was impossible. Chinese expect to be welcomed to countries throughout the world, expect to get visas and scholarships, and understand that they will be encouraged to integrate. They expect the right to become citizens of other countries eventually, or to adopt Christian, Muslim or Jewish faith, if they wish; but then, seemingly arrogantly, or at least contradictorily, believe that foreigners could not and should not become a Chinese citizen. The apparent double standard begs a more thorough investigation.

I believe the Jewish people are one of the greatest nations in the world and they are playing an important role in our world, but I don't think it's important to study Hebrew language.

Chinese people and the Jews are both ancient peoples, but the differences are large. Chinese people live in the same area, (tend to stay close to their birthplace) whilst Jews are dispersed throughout the world. Chinese people advocate harmony whilst Jews are faced with competition [conflict] most of the time. Moreover the language that the Chinese use and the language of the Jews come from completely different cultural systems.

At the start of my class I opened with a series of contrasts between Chinese and Jews; I described how different they were and how they reflect entirely antithetical social dynamics. Some of the students, who had been excited to learn about Jews and Judaism, were noticeably uncomfortable, and for a short period of time seemed less interested in the subject. The Chinese conscientiously try to find similarities and harmony in their relationships and circumstances, and the notion of existing and cooperating with something irreconcilably different is new and somehow threatening. Noting difference is tantamount to turning off the light. However, I persisted with this approach, and the students came to understand my point surprisingly quickly, and they began to appreciate that differences could also be an asset.

The Jews haven't had a real land but a spiritual homeland, China now faces the opposite problem, we have our own land but are gradually losing our spiritual home.

There is genuine interest, or perhaps sympathy, with the Jews, who are characterized as being without a homeland. The Chinese are so completely oriented towards the Middle Kingdom that a nation that does not have a homeland astounds them. Even the national minorities of China have a homeland and are entitled to it by Chinese law. The concept of a homeless minority is disarming and confounding to the Chinese sensibilities.

I think Jews and Chinese have friendly relations because both are wise enough to understand that good relations will give each other profit in all aspects.

Studying about Jews is important because their wisdom shocks the world, Israel is only a small nation, but many scientists, philosophers, and millionaires are Jews. The Jewish bible has influenced the Western world and even the whole world. It amazes me how Jews have kept their customs after being dispersed for many years. I want to understand how Jews teach their children.

I know little, it is said they are intelligent and aggressive, maybe related to their education and language. I heard a story about Jewish education, a mother puts honey on a book then let her son lick it, in this way the boy learns books are sweet and he will be interested in reading and studying. I don't know if this is true but it seems creative and interesting and useful.

### **Jews as worthy of emulation**

In China there are many people who say the Jews are a very smart people. They are experts in finance, philosophy and most importantly they are especially good in business. The good thing about the Jews is that they are a smart people and do well in many things. The bad thing about the Jews is that they are in war with the Arab world. The war between the Jews and the Arab people has lasted thousands of years.

Israel is not a big country but it owns hi technology in science and military. In a word, Israel is a rich country.

Jews have helped China a lot like in culture and helped our air force with the J-10 fighter aircraft. Chinese helped the Jews during WWII. There is a friendship between Jewish people and Chinese people.

There are many relations between China and the Jews for example in military affairs and cultural affairs. They are both countries with a glorious culture. If we build a relationship between each other, we can progress in many aspects and [engage in] cultural exchange.

The Jews can be said to be one of the smartest nations in the world and they are very successful in almost every field. So to study the Jew can make us learn better and get more wisdom.

I know very little about Jews, [except] that they have an old history; like China they didn't have their land until 1945. I hear Jews are very

clever. In modern times they have done a lot for humanity in many areas. But I know few details and know nothing about Judaism, though I think it is necessary and important to learn.

The two cultures and languages are in contrast and I think it is necessary for the two to contact each other.

We should learn from the Jewish people who are better than us, and then we can make progress in many ways. Now, Israel is richer than China, so as a Chinese student, I must learn from the Jews and study the Jews, for our country and motherland. We want to grow and become stronger.

One of the significant differences between the Euro-American and Chinese education systems is the relative values placed on the role and functionality of the subject matter. For Chinese, the subject needs to be useful otherwise it does not warrant study. In Western research universities any subject belonging to the body of knowledge can and should be explored whether or not its usefulness and utility is known or even if the subject may well never again be relevant.<sup>10</sup> The students responding to these questions were clearly seeking reasons for their study of the course on Jewish Civilization, and needed reasons to justify contact and friendship between the Chinese and Jewish civilizations.

China has, in the past, been deeply isolationist and self-sufficient, the prevailing view being that it needed nothing from the outside world. The self-imposed closure of its ports in the 1800s ultimately led to the outbreak of the Opium Wars. The motivation for study in general and interest in the Jews in particular is invariably linked to national feelings and interest. The willingness to humbly learn from someone else who is perceived to be more intelligent or superior in some other way is a temporary concession until the necessary skills are acquired and this reverence is no longer necessary.

There is an interesting similarity between this attitude and that of ultra-orthodox Jews who are prepared to associate with non-ultra-orthodox or non-Jews when it comes to matters of necessity, mainly business. None the less the dynamics between the two are different and are discussed in more detail elsewhere.

I knew that Jews are the ancient people and they made money by selling jewellery. Jewish intelligence and ability is worthy of Chinese study.

Marx was a Jew that deeply affected modern China and was accepted by the Chinese Communist Party who is integrating it with Chinese characteristics.

The Jews are the most rational nation in the world and they have the highest synthetical wisdom.

The Jewish population accounts for 0.3% of the world population and 11.6% of Nobel Prize winners.

Jews are clever, full of wisdom and do well in many fields such as business, philosophy and physics.

Most of them are very rich. Their education is very good, they are very clever.

Jews are very smart and tough people who have their traditional habits for many thousands of years, with little change. The law is the most important part of being Jewish.

After class I felt that the Jewish people are not so hard to get along with and are friendly. It is amazing they have held their traditions and beliefs so firmly.

## Evolution of the concept of Jew in Chinese consciousness

The Chinese impression of Jews has taken on several incarnations over the centuries. The first may well have been the impact of the thousand-year Jewish presence in Kaifeng. It is said that several Jews achieved prominence in imperial China; they were recognized as a distinct minority, yet the Chinese predilection towards harmony and integration caused their eventual assimilation, so that reference to Jews and Judaism does not refer to China's ethnic Jews.<sup>11</sup>

Another impression of Jews came as a result of the translation of the Bible into Chinese by Christian missionaries, resulting in some biblical and Jewish references entering Chinese literary circles and filtering through the language. Several stereotypes of Jews have formed from Christian ideas infiltrating China's scholarly classes, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. The continual flow of foreign literature into China has also informed and misinformed Chinese perceptions of Jews. Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* introduced the idea of Jews being mean.<sup>12</sup>

Despite this, there is surprisingly little doctrinal basis for Chinese impressions, so the misunderstandings and misperceptions are more liquid and responsive to change.

It is likely that the Baghdadi Jewish traders in the Far East during the 1900s made a deep impression on the Chinese, especially in Hong Kong and Shanghai where large tracts of property were owned by Jews, and it seems apparent that the censorship, distortions and lack of interest in historical detail in the period leading up to the establishment of the People's Republic of China only partly inform public opinion of Jews and do not seem to be the primary source for the general perception of Jews.

The later arrival of the Russian Jews in Harbin during the 1910s–1920s and the German Jews of Shanghai in the 1940s made an even deeper impression and stimulated important translations of Jewish works into Chinese, which influenced the Chinese intelligentsia. The status assumed by the Chinese as host nation to the Jews, while sharing a common plight from persecution, lent affinities and comradeship to the relationship and perceptions of Jews.

A relatively high number of Jews who lived throughout various provinces became heroes and made outstanding contributions to Chinese society over

a range of endeavors. This has contributed to the complexity of the impressions and to the grassroots popularity of the Jews in China.<sup>13</sup>

The main thrust of Chinese impressions of Jews seems to have emerged from a more unlikely place. In his book *The Fugu Plan*, Marvin Tokayer describes how the Japanese became infatuated with the Jews and tried to set up a Jewish enclave in Russian Manchuria (now northern China), in an attempt to use Jewish brains and financial savvy to gain world dominance.<sup>14</sup> It is plausible that Japanese impressions of Jews filtered into Chinese consciousness throughout the decades of occupation and influence, and informed some of the present stereotypes Chinese have of Jews. This argument is particularly compelling as the Chinese views seem to mirror closely those of the Japanese. Chinese scholars and students viewed Japan as a source of inspiration and enlightenment; many studied in Japan and translated Japanese literature. The likelihood of this type of influence is arguable on several accounts.

Tokayer outlines the development of Japanese perceptions of Jews in two main stages. The vice-governor of the state-owned Bank of Japan, Baron Korekiyo Takahashi, was in London in 1904 trying to raise money for the war against the Russians. In a chance meeting with Mr Jacob Schiff, an American Jewish banker and partner at the large investment bank Kuhn Loeb, they shared their mutual hatred for Tsar Nicholas II, the latter because of the pogroms against Jews in the Russian town of Kishinev. Subsequently Mr Schiff arranged a loan of £5 million for Japan and paved the way for loans up to £200 million to the Japanese military, which secured the Japanese victory over Russia. Jacob Schiff became a national hero in Japan. Newspapers and history textbooks dedicated pages to him, not so much as an American but as a Jew. In this way, the term “Jew” became synonymous with access to and control of vast sums of money.

The second stage was in 1919 when Japan fought alongside the White Russian army led by the fervently anti-Jewish general Gregorii Semonov, who handed out copies of the famously anti-Semitic book *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* to all his soldiers, along with their guns and other military equipment. Aimed at boosting their morale and their hatred of the Bolsheviks, it influenced the 75,000 Japanese soldiers who until then had never had negative views of Jews. It had a particular impact on a young Japanese soldier, Captain Norihiro Yasue, a Russian-language expert posted to General Semonov’s staff. In 1922, after the war, Yasue translated *The Protocols* for the Japanese Army Intelligence Bureau and ran a research group focused on Jewish power and its strategic applications.

*The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was interpreted differently from the way in which it was intended. Instead of hating or despising the Jews, as the anti-Semitic writers had intended, the Japanese developed great respect for the Jews and henceforth harbored a desire to cooperate with them for the purpose of world dominance. The Chinese stereotype of the Jew is somewhat similar, suggesting that the basis of their perceptions of Jews came from Japan and from anti-Semitic literature translated from Japanese into Chinese. Filtered

within an Asian context, these perceptions produce not hatred but rather respect and awe. However, grossly distorted stereotypes, devoid of truth or depth, will no doubt change and become further distorted. The building of a perception of a nation on false and deceptive foundations cannot have long-term viability.

The perception of Jews in China continues to change and seems to be a matter of public, private, diplomatic and international debate. Even more curious is the liberal attitude of the government in allowing the press and the internet to air views freely on this issue, seemingly serving as a *de facto* litmus test for the debate surrounding freedom of expression in China.

Until 1992, the Chinese press was overtly anti-Israeli and pro-Palestinian. While this does not necessarily indicate an anti-Jewish bias, it indicates that the perceptions were strictly controlled by government forces. Zhang Ping discusses the process in which anti-Israel sentiment in China dramatically changed course and became a strong pro-Israel and pro-Jewish sentiment as the Internet replaced the government-endorsed information media. In this article he demonstrates the power of the internet in China in guiding Chinese popular perceptions and how the debate around Israel and Jews became more complex, international and less stereotypical.<sup>15</sup>

These days many people, Chinese and otherwise, form their basic impression of Jews from material found on the internet; those who seek more information can turn to a huge range of books. Chinese attitudes towards Jews are also informed by a considerable publishing spree of books relating to Judaism and Jews, as discussed above. Many of these books reinforce superficial stereotypes of Jews and border on the vulgar. Highly superficial, stereotypical descriptions of Jewish subjects written for popular appeal are forcing corrections and debate amongst scholars and the emergence of more academic publications, increasing in volume every year. Jewish Studies departments and units being established in several Chinese universities are working to remedy these stereotypes and inaccuracies, and Chinese students are now more likely to get a more balanced and proportional understanding of Jews and Jewish culture.<sup>16</sup> Translated Jewish and Israeli novels are also becoming popular. In many ways the academic interest in Jewish Studies is informed and motivated by the sensationalism surrounding the Jews, and they seem to feed and inform each other.

The growth of various charismatic Christian groups in China gives rise to a number of issues regarding the way they depict Jews in their doctrinal systems. Inherent in their doctrine is a mission to raise the profile of and support for the state of Israel, and as a result the depiction of the Jew is becoming more complicated, and this contributes to the growing melting-pot of impressions likely to become a part of a future Chinese assessment of Jews.

Islamic influence is also considerable. Until 1992, China was aligned with the Arab bloc and still maintains close ties with most Islamic nations.<sup>17</sup> A considerable Islamic community has existed in China for a thousand years over that time and models have been developed for coexistence with other

religions and cultures which served to yield moderate and tolerant ethnic minorities; the ideologies amongst them continue to develop, some steering away from the traditional fusion with Chinese and Confucian culture towards a more Arabic and foreign Islamic character which could stir up rebelliousness and religious zealotry.<sup>18</sup> As more Muslims and Arabs move to China and establish communities in Chinese cities, their influence on the local mosque and the views of local Muslims becomes more pronounced. Guangzhou in the south of China has an especially large and growing Arabic community, and Chinese Muslims have been influenced and radicalized to various degrees as a result. The growing Israeli and Jewish community has experienced a sense of unease at these developments, but under a strong government their security and sense of safety is still, at this time, preserved.

### **Attitudes towards foreigners**

In many ways China is a nation of fervently proud and patriotic people,<sup>19</sup> such that it could be interpreted as hyper-nationalistic. Since Chinese social characteristics do not even closely correlate with Western notions of nationalism, simple comparisons as to the effects of nationalism cannot be easily drawn. However, whatever the basis of the fervor, and however genuine it is, and whatever the outcomes of any comparisons, this style of patriotism is intrinsically connected with a deep-rooted belief in ethnic supremacy and superior intelligence.

The Chinese, known for offering a polite “face” to foreign guests, a sign of their sense of restraint – considered to be a characteristic of superiority, and of their cultural, almost patriotic, obligation to exercise it with the greatest courtesy (and inscrutability) – are invariably gracious to visitors. None the less they rarely rush to offer such kind words regarding other foreign nationalities in the way they do for Jews. Europeans, perceived as being a cause of the humiliating Chinese concessions and of the Opium Wars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, are only now beginning to receive a somewhat warmer reception. Americans, perceived as the modern incarnation of colonialism, are tolerated because of their technology and their economic strength, but not particularly liked. Arabs, who have been trading with China for a thousand years and have seen a resurgence over recent decades, are accepted as a necessity of a growing economy, but their religious proclivities are not appreciated and the radicalization of local Muslims is considered by Chinese intellectuals to be a problem. A worthwhile test of the Chinese attitude to various nationalities can very easily be gauged by taking a taxi and engaging in friendly conversation with the taxi driver. Mentioning that you are Russian, English, American, Iranian or French would not likely elicit a particularly meaningful or enthusiastic reply – probably just a perfunctory courteous (or not-so-courteous) acknowledgment. Saying that you are Jewish invariably brings forth a friendly, interested and supportive response.



There is a propensity in China to heavy stereotyping. This is perhaps born of dependence on the heavily controlled, propagandist media, the necessity of learning about the world from secondary and tertiary sources, with virtually no personal exposure to realities outside China in the sense that information is heavily censored and filtered. Perhaps, as mentioned above, it emerges from the learning process via the Chinese character system. Simplistic depiction of other peoples can, in the right political mood, be steered towards denigration and even hatred of foreigners. Foreigners are referred to as “White Devils” and by other disparaging references, which are not intended to insult but, as they settle into the Chinese mind, can be used to delegitimize and denigrate.

This is of course not unique to China, and perhaps the Chinese have been able to control xenophobic outbreaks more effectively than Western countries have. In the lead-up to the Beijing Olympic Games, there were definite signs of widespread anti-Western sentiment throughout the country, especially against the backdrop of anti-Chinese, pro-Tibetan demonstrations on the Olympic torch route.

The intense and non-censured patriotism shared by 95 percent of Chinese in support of Chinese national unity suggests indifference to the will of some of their minorities and to voices around the world. The near-unanimous belief that they are right and legitimized and even profoundly righteous in their position is still far from being xenophobic, but suggests that some of the seeds for xenophobia and extreme nationalism are waiting *in potentia*. These feelings could (and in some cases have) fomented open hostility; the media, controlled by government policy, have fueled these sentiments – perhaps in order to show the power of the people’s feelings, and as a warning that the government stands in the middle, managing and withholding the more extreme passions of its population, and finally to warn foreigners off undermining China’s national interests.

### **On anti-Semitism, philo-Semitism and stereotypes**

Clearly, heavy stereotyping and group association of foreigners, including of Jews, exists, but these thought processes are bound to be broken over time. The perception of foreigners as heroes and glitzy, rich and skill-laden, gleaned from movies and electronic media, is already being challenged by the many tens of thousands of English teachers living and working in second-, third- and fourth-tier cities, many of them disenfranchised and relatively uneducated, to present a different face of the stereotypical image of foreigners. As more Chinese travel abroad, learn English and have access to other sources of information, their impressions of foreigners, and of Jews will invariably mature. The perception of foreigners in the large cities of Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou has already changed as the meeting of cultures takes its effect. Many Chinese residents of big cities have a negative image of foreigners, who have come to be known as bar-hopping, loud, party-happy, rude and licentious. The perception – some would say fact – that many or even some



foreigners take advantage of Chinese women is particularly offensive and has aroused a lot of media attention, particularly in Chinese blogs.

Jews have not yet fallen victim to this criticism of and reaction towards foreigners. They have not been categorized in negative terms or associated with the scourge of foreigners entering China. Perhaps the continual praise of the Jew in the media and amongst representative groups of Chinese is indicative of their hope of attracting a respectable, creative and dignified foreigner. A Chinese saying, “Foreigners from afar come for serious purposes”, suggests that those who (historically) made the arduous trip to China would not do so for undignified reasons. As international travel becomes easier, this saying loses its poignancy, but continued distinction of Jews from other foreigners may indicate China’s hope and a welcome attitude to people of different cultures, so long as they are serious and respectable.

### **Jews as a reflection of Chinese ambition**

They are clever and excellent in every area except physical labor. Perhaps they are too astute and their way of doing business may break moral principles.

I think our school should provide more courses on this subject and Chinese culture should learn something useful and very different from Jewish culture. More contact!

Before this class I knew little about Jews and Judaism other than they had a good mind for earning money, they are spread all over the world and their country’s name is Israel. A great change occurred from knowing nothing to falling in love with it.

There are famous Jews such as Einstein, Freud and so on. They are clever and diligent and make great contributions to the human race. They created a great civilization; they are so different from us because they don’t even have a regular place to live. They have been through a difficult history, driven out of countries, especially during WWII. The cruel slaughter by the Nazis was a huge disaster but they became more strong and united afterwards. I heard it is the Shabbat that kept Jews Jews, I think this is a miracle.

Before coming to class I knew little about Jews, but my rough impression was they were highly successful in business and in the domain of science as well as other subjects.

I know nothing about Jews except they are great, many great scientists are Jews.

Jews are serious, earnest and pious and proud, Chinese are romantic, warm hearted, atheistic and humble. The differences are interesting and we can learn from each other.

Young Chinese are very ambitious. Money and position are very important indicators of success, of honor and of status. Wealth is becoming increasingly

equated with the most important traditional Chinese icon – the family, respect (and financial responsibility) for parents, care for children, receiving an expensive education. The Jews are perceived to be deeply committed to the family, intelligent and very rich; achieving this so effectively with what appears to be such little infrastructure seems to have captivated the imagination and respect of Chinese people. The Jews may in many ways represent their ultimate expectation and hopes and projections of what foreigners (and themselves) ought and wish to achieve. Seeking a model and heroes from other cultures, the Jew may represent a popular civilizational icon, which can be adored or talked about with few repercussions for their own lives.

The local Chinese inhabitants of Shanghai are often called “the Jews of China” because of their general development, clever disposition, economic prosperity and financial acumen, and perhaps also because of a perception that they are not generous with their money.<sup>20</sup> The term “Jew” (*yutairen*) is used in the context of “tight-fisted” or stingy, in the same way that Jews are derogatively described in Western countries, but also has other connotations referring to being good at business and careful with money, which is viewed positively in China.

The most impressive vestiges of great individual wealth not connected to the power of the State are associated with the Jews who settled in Shanghai from the late nineteenth century until around 1950. The Hartoum, Khaddourie and Sassoon families were some of the wealthiest people in Asia in the early part of the twentieth century. They owned large tracts of what is now downtown Shanghai (Puxi). As becoming wealthy is aggrandized, supported by government and legitimized ethically and culturally, the legends of Jews’ wealth in China will also become part of the modern financial narrative of the Chinese.

### **Jews as a non-threat factor**

It seems that Jews present an easy and non-threatening focus of praise. Perhaps not being intimidating, threatening or in competition for the title of super-power, Chinese feel that they can praise the Jews without it reflecting negatively on them. Praising the Americans would imply that the American culture is superior to the Chinese. Perhaps patronizing the Jews has no risk of giving this impression, as it is palpably and laughably obvious that Jews cannot be in competition with China. Furthermore, Jews were not involved in the humiliation of China by Western powers and, unlike other religions such as Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, do not seek to colonize or make converts, rendering themselves intellectually and culturally non-threatening to Chinese domestic life.

Even though Chinese and Jewish scholars and diplomats back-slap each other and express mutual satisfaction that anti-Semitism never reared its head in China, the dynamics of nationalism, ethnic discrimination, ideology and hatred towards minorities encapsulated in anti-Semitism reflect more complex

societal processes and should not be dismissed as being impossible within the Chinese context. The style of anti-Semitism developed in Europe does not flourish in China because Chinese priorities and sense of group are different. None the less fervent nationalism and a sense of superiority can easily resonate amongst many Chinese, and often does, and the needs and positions of “the other” are not always accommodated.

Differences, while accepted, are downplayed in favor of what is common and what is harmonious. The Jewish presence in China can hedge itself as being both “part of, and different from” China. For example, the Kaifeng Jewish community famously described itself on the community’s stone steles in terms of reflecting Confucian thought, and being a part of the greater Chinese culture. The Baghdadi–British-Jewish traders were not entirely associated with the humiliating concessions made to Europe: Jewish families settled down in China over generations and became part of the fabric of Chinese life. As mentioned above, Russian and German Jews collaborated with the Chinese and became heroes of the Chinese people, and were perceived not as aggressors and colonizers but as fellows in imperialistic persecution.

One of the frequent remarks Chinese make of Jews is how they have survived outside a homeland. As suggested earlier, the sympathy evoked from this astounding phenomenon may lend itself to a form of patronizing praise of Jews. For Chinese, lack of sovereignty is the source of the deepest humiliation and powerlessness, so to a landless people such as Jews the Chinese can afford to be benevolent and magnanimous, and to extend courteous sympathy and respect.

Perhaps the strong criticism of Israel by the Chinese State-controlled media suggests that a landed Jewish group challenges the Chinese image of the Jew. The reaction to Israel and its territorial claims has demonstrated hypocritical double standards on the part of the Chinese government.<sup>21</sup> Whilst Taiwan and Tibet are claimed to be undeniably and irrevocably integral elements of the Chinese homeland, Jerusalem, the Jewish people’s sole capital for 2500 years, should, to the Chinese mind, be negotiated with the Arab world, for the sake of peace, civilizational harmony and regional stability.

Despite the political tensions and the alliances with Israel’s detractors, the Chinese are determined to nurture relations with Israel and the Jewish people in areas that they feel produce important exchanges: science, technology, innovation and Jewish Studies.

It remains a mystery how, despite their similar cultural and intellectual objectives, China continues to entrench strategic alliances with the Arab and Islamic nations, whose religious and cultural ambitions are virtually irreconcilably antithetical and mutually exclusive, over an alliance with Israel and her American allies. While the Chinese interest in the unencumbered flow of oil is the openly declared factor, there may well be intellectual and psychological motives invested in this relationship, relating to the way

they view each other and the nature of civilization and national interests, worthy of deeper investigation.

Chinese expressions of tolerance for Jews also suggest indirect criticism of Western and other “enlightened” countries that have a history of anti-Semitism. Chinese authorities are aware of the public-opinion value of tolerance of and friendship towards Jews, and they make efforts to extol the history of Chinese cities open to Jews during World War II and to allow the airing of philo-Semitism. This is of significant value as Europe and the United States criticize China’s human rights record.

Giving and saving “face” in China is common, expected and socially correct, and is a graceful component of Chinese culture. It is freely given by the host to the guest, by the strong to the less strong. However, were the Jews to present any real threat or economic competition to China, it is doubtful that this praise would be as readily forthcoming. Were Jewish communities to put down roots in Chinese soil and function as a religion and ethnicity that celebrates difference as a mark of its identity, while competing for the same resources and opportunities in China’s business climate, it is unclear how the Chinese would respond and in what way the reactions to Jewish people would change.

### **Genetic or cultural**

As mentioned in the student surveys above, there is a current of thought suggestive of a view that the Jews are behind the success of American business and intellectual achievements; that it is not the superiority of American culture, democracy, capitalism and free press, but the anomaly of the Jews escaping Europe and settling in America that is behind America’s great success and record of high achievement. This narrative seems to be used by some Chinese strata both to save face and to provide a justification for the relatively embryonic level of innovation and technological ability in China.

I explored these themes further in a class of philosophy students and asked them to address the issue of whether Jewish success is genetic or social. I noted the consistency of the view that it is not genetic but social, and the possibility did occur to me that preferring a genetic cause of success would undermine or irritate their sense of national ambition and superiority, and this may have provided a motive for the uniform response that Jewish success was not born of genetic superiority. While not known for diversity of thought, I have observed amongst Chinese students that only the subject of patriotism (with its gamut of inclusions) produces uniformity of opinion to such high degrees. To the question of Taiwan’s status as part of China, no student would offer the slightest doubt about this fact. A subject with the potential to affect the national consciousness is not afforded the luxury of digression, individual musings or intellectual exploration. I of course agree with them that Jewish achievement is not genetic, but due to social conditions, but I am surprised that not one person pondered the possibility that the Jews possessed genetic qualities that bred success, leading me to suspect that their opinions were

subconsciously driven by patriotism and not by intellectual integrity. Asked if they thought Chinese success was genetic, the respondents were divided whether this was due to social or genetic factors.

It is certainly fortunate that the stereotypes of Jews have not led to negative destructive repercussions. China's own ambition for wealth and influence, its apparent ethnic patriotism and sense of exclusivism preclude it from sharing the European anti-Semitic hatred of Jews as elite power clichés. But there is nothing to guarantee that other forms of anti-Semitism will not emerge. Anti-Semitism is a fluid emotion which changes form and format over place and time. Furthermore there is a strong tendency to repudiate other nationalities in China, an inclination towards insularity. These are components which breed intolerance. Fused with totalitarian power and absence of intellectual and ethical checks and balances, the ability to exercise hatred against minorities is not a remote impossibility. It is unlikely that Jews will become a force of significance in China to warrant this reaction, but these emotions may be directed towards others.

### **Government-inspired favor**

In the European context, the relationship of government and citizenry to its Jewish population was often an indicator of general tolerance levels and openness of society. The Chinese, perhaps aware of this, are careful to ensure that any hatred for Jews is not expressed. It is conceivable that attempts to express anti-Semitic opinions are repressed and internet sites blocked. The near-complete absence of open anti-Semitic material is so abnormal it suggests interference and censorship in the free expression of thought. Perhaps this is a positive step, but it may also suggest the intentional desire to be presented as a society tolerant of others.

As to the question whether Chinese could become hostile to Jews in the future, many Jews joke that the reason for the absence of anti-Semitism in China is because there have been no Jews. It is not inconceivable that, as the Jewish community grows and integrates within Chinese life, some hostilities may emerge. If economic downturns threaten the stability of China, a convenient scapegoat may be sought. The history of the Jewish presence in Asia already provides a sufficient narrative to support accusations of these kinds; and the homogeneity of the Chinese public as it relates to patriotism is such that, if a group is perceived to threaten the country, little mercy would be shown. Present anti-Western attitudes expressed in rallies and demonstrations have not related or referred directly or indirectly to Jews, and it seems far from the lexicon of protest. Jews, for better or for worse, are still associated with economic development, and China's economy shows few signs of faltering for the moment.

No doubt the Chinese attitude towards Jews will evolve. As Western peoples, including Jews, build their own communities in China, as personal, cultural, economic and political interaction matures, as literature becomes

more freely available, and as more Chinese travel and study abroad, the Chinese conceptions of “the other” and of the Jew will also evolve and perhaps take on enveloped significance within a Chinese context. As Chinese intellectual axes become more diverse and literary, and religious and political horizons expand beyond existing Asian norms, the Chinese attitudes to Jews and Judaism may express this diversity. This is not to say that anti-Semitism is a necessary or predestined outcome; on the contrary, as China increasingly commits itself to tolerance and peace, and as it continues its proactive steps to ensure that its citizenry are well balanced and integrated into the international community, the Jewish icon could become increasingly important and valuable, diversified from its present economic and political associations, and the Chinese history of friendly overtures to the Jews could triumphantly accompany it to become a paradigm of tolerance, and as a “fortunate” consequence shame other nations with less tolerant ethical records.

### **Jewish responses to Chinese perceptions**

It is indeed flattering to hear some of the comments Chinese express for Jews. Some Jews respond to what they hear with confusion; others are humored. Considering the wounds inflicted by European anti-Semitism, the Chinese philo-Semitic version is understandably a more appealing option. However, even though this is flattering, the majority of Jews hearing such comments are somewhat taken aback by the gross stereotyping and troubling superficiality. Many wonder what small trigger could cause these stereotypes to change and become negative and virile.

Hearing superlatives can make people, Jewish or otherwise, feel veritably uncomfortable, and not a little astonished at the unrestrained acceptance and praise. In their respective homelands, being Jewish may be a source of embarrassment, such that Jews often disguise their identities amongst new-found friends, measuring the views and biases of acquaintances and colleagues until they feel more comfortable to admit their ethnicity, or until avoiding the subject is no longer reasonable. In China, this subconscious caution is thrown to the wind. Association as a Jew is an asset, an immediate source of respect where credit is given with nothing required in return, particularly special in a culture built very much on *guan xi*.<sup>22</sup> It comes as a surprising source of empowerment, pride, and an easy way to gain kudos – be it in a taxi, with students, in a business meeting, with government officials, or even as a suitor! Wherever it may be, the response is generally positive. Recognition as a Jew does not come with the associations of killing Christ, drinking Christian blood, having horns, being tight-fisted, or being a saint or a traitor or cheat or any other biblical or medieval historical associations. This presents new emotions and unexpected circumstances for Jews and presents refreshing opportunities for the contemporary Jewish–Asian encounter.

For more strongly identifying Jews, in contrast to assimilated Jews, the Chinese display of admiration is received with mixed feelings. On the one

hand, it is an affirmation that Jewish culture and tradition has vindicated itself in the eyes of a mighty nation. In many ways the Chinese represent for Jews the ultimate “other”; in a strange way China represents a Jewish alter ego. A reflection of sorts, not of what is, but of what could have been. If the ancient Israelites had remained rooted in their land and had not been decimated and dispersed by the First Exile of 586 BCE, perhaps they may have grown in size and strength like the Chinese. China represents a condition that the Jews had and lost and now could never regain.

China’s long history, its large and diverse populations, its isolation over the centuries and its absence from most of Jewish history naturally excludes it from blame for the persecution of Jews. Hence traditional Jews have nothing negative to say about the Chinese. Neither side blames the other for their mutual feelings of oppression. China’s resources and resourcefulness, its might and size, its long and splendid dynasties, and absolute sovereignty are admired by Jews without grudge. China represents one of the most exotic, distant and different lands on earth. Its strength is respected and admired. Its national pride, unity, determination and willingness to sacrifice are considered positive and praiseworthy by religious Jews. Its tremendous rise is a source of excitement and curiosity. David Ben Gurion, Israel’s first prime minister, was very quick to recognize, praise and support China in its earliest and most traumatic years. Many Jews came to China, in numbers disproportionate to other foreigners, throughout the most isolated and desolate periods of modern Chinese history. The sense of being small and in need of a patron comes to mind when Jews consider their future relations with Chinese. When Jews hear the praise offered by Chinese they interpret this as a possible hand of friendship and recognition extended between two civilizations. The sense that mutual cooperation can and should exist is prevalent.

Chinese willingness to state that the Jews are a great nation, either like the Chinese, or greater than the Chinese, is a wonderful affirmation for orthodox and secular Jews alike, who often suffer from insecurities on various levels.

On the other hand, in the eyes of orthodox Jews, this perception is based on entirely misguided reasoning. Not from money and economic prowess are the Jews the wisest of nations, but because of the Torah and the ethical and legal teachings of the rabbis. In the minds of orthodox Jews, the praise of Jews offered by the Chinese is praise of the Torah – of Jewish law and tradition, perceived as the nation’s guiding light; without land, king, natural resources, and with a fraction of the population, Jews credit the Torah and the guidance of the rabbis with Jewish survival. Though recognition of the nations of the world is expected, when it comes, it is surprising and explained as a matter of long-overdue process. The reply is not gratuitous or pride-filled but taken as something which is necessary, expected, and to be taken seriously and with modesty. The Jewish greatness is finally recognized. For the orthodox Jew, the Chinese are seen as a nation, not as individuals; they are stereotyped in much the same way as the Chinese stereotype the



Jews; they are described as people who respect the Jewish people, and whose civilization is beginning to engage with Jewish civilization. The opening of communication with the Chinese is a curious possibility for the religious Jewish imagination, its horizons not yet explored.

Over the decades a relatively high number of loosely affiliated Jews, disaffected with their Western or Jewish heritage, have come to China in search of a new identity and cultural horizon, and have embraced Chinese language and thought. Hearing how positively the Chinese view them specifically as Jews seems to leave an impression. A proportionally high number re-embrace Judaism more passionately, a surprising number becoming orthodox.<sup>23</sup> This is related to a combination of factors including the positive affirmation of their Jewishness combined with their inability to fully assimilate into Chinese culture and their relentless sense of not belonging despite their determined will to do so.

Jewish intellectuals may be offended by the stereotypes and worried by the possibilities that these images founded on error will change and turn into negative stereotypes also founded on error. For others, the generalization of a nation possessing homogeneous characteristics is anachronistic, a throw-back to medieval thought, grossly stereotypical, anti-individualistic, archaic, primitive, and is in itself anti-Semitic in nature – presuming to define the Jews with one brushstroke.

When Chinese attitudes to Jews are told from mouth to ear in Jewish communities in Israel and around the world, people respond positively to what sounds to them an incredible phenomenon. A place where Jews are actually liked and respected and where opportunities are open and waiting for them describes a Jewish utopia. In an almost knee-jerk reaction, China is viewed as a good country. This response runs contrary to or parallel with other, more universal concerns about China's international reputation and human rights record. The Chinese attitude to the Jewish people represents to them a human rights standard on its own. Jewish tourists often choose to visit China because of its friendliness to Jews; and stories of cancelled Jewish tours to France, for example, in favor of China are told illustrating the sense of fraternity Jews feel with China and its reception of Jews. Flattered, many emotionally charged Jews feel that they are paradigmatic visitors in China, much like in ancient days, under the millet system of the Ottoman Empire; they see themselves as representatives of two civilizations meeting each other and forging historical ties of friendship.

Perhaps more subconsciously than anything else, China's respect and acceptance of Jews provides an option, in the back of Jewish people's minds, as an escape route, a place where Jews could flee in times of trouble or persecution. An undetermined percentage of Jews are actualizing this option and coming to China. The ripple seems to be growing larger every year, including Oriental Jews, Russian, French and American Jews, and an increasing flow of Israelis who are seeking residence and business opportunities in China's trade cities.



## Conclusion

No doubt, in response to these circumstances, Jews may discover fertile territory for the expression of new, less guarded attitudes. Some may fall into a false sense of security and even into a sense of self-grandeur as Chinese look at them with curiosity, respect and praise. A fool may think he is more clever; a poor man may think he is richer; a plump suitor may think he is irresistibly attractive. It should be interesting to observe what personalities and ideas emerge from Jewish communities growing up in an environment with pre-conceived positive stereotypes unencumbered by negative and derogatory sentiments.

Ideas are never static. Observing how these perceptions change, adapt, and respond to political and economic conditions over the next fifty years of Asian social development is worthy of attention and valuable to many disciplines of research.

## Notes

- 1 See Saloman Wald, *China and the Jewish People: Old Civilizations in a New Era* (Jerusalem: Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, 2004), pp. 94–103, 110. He quotes a study undertaken by S. Katz.
- 2 See Avrum Ehrlich (ed.), *Negotiating Identity amongst the Religious Minorities of Asia* (Leiden/Boston, Mass.: E. J. Brill, 2009).
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 See Ariana Eunjung Cha, “Sold on a stereotype: in China”, Washington Post Foreign Service, 7 February 2007.
- 5 For a more complete list, see Bibliography.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 See Chapter 4.
- 8 A very observable problem with the Chinese education system is that students are not encouraged to be critical, lateral thinkers. Generations of rote learning and mindless adherence to “the party line” has dulled cognitive creativity, intellectual curiosity and the ability to entertain conflicting thought processes.
- 9 However, it is allowable under the provisions of the Nationality Law of the People’s Republic of China, articles 7 and 8. Perhaps the most pertinent example here is that of the celebrated Polish-Russian Jewish journalist and author Israel Epstein (1915–2005), who became a Chinese citizen in 1957, quite incredibly given the political environment in China at that time. He was one of the few foreign-born non-Chinese to become a member of the Communist Party of China; he served in the politburo and on many high-level committees, had close relationships with Chinese leaders from Mao to Hu, and he remained highly regarded and wielded not a little influence in Chinese politics throughout his lifetime.
- 10 For a more detailed discussion of this, see Chapter 4.
- 11 For more information on the Jewish community of Kaifeng, see Avrum Ehrlich and Liang Pingan, “The contemporary condition of the descendants of the Jews of Kaifeng”, Xu Xin, “Chinese government policy towards the Jews of Kaifeng and their descendants”, and Anson Laytner, “The Judaism of Kaifeng Jews and liberal Judaism in America”, in Avrum Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish–Chinese Nexus: A Meeting of Civilizations* (London: Routledge, 2008).
- 12 See Chapter 4.

- 13 For a more detailed study of heroic Jewish figures in China, Matthias Messmer, "China's reality from the viewpoint of Jewish foreign experts", in Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish–Chinese Nexus*.
- 14 Marvin Tokayer and Mary Swartz, *The Fugu Plan: The Untold Story of the Japanese and the Jews during World War II*, (New York: Paddington Press, 1979), pp. 45–55.
- 15 See Zhang Ping, "Israel and the Jewish people on Chinese cyberspace since 2002", in Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish–Chinese Nexus*.
- 16 See Chapter 4.
- 17 Liang Pingan, "Chinese contributions to Mid East stability", in Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish–Chinese Nexus*.
- 18 See Ehrlich (ed.), *Negotiating Identity amongst the Religious Minorities of Asia*.
- 19 I fall short of full belief in this apparent nationalism and patriotism because in many other ways Chinese people and institutions demonstrate an utter lack of respect and regard for their country, and even for each other. Whilst detailed justification of this somewhat provocative statement must surely be for another forum, by way of brief illustration Chinese are selectively, judiciously proud, possibly born of ignorance, arrogance, extension of China's former glories, and possibly from fear or as compensation for insecurity. While patriotism is rampant, there is not a lot of evidence of respect for the country, evidenced by pollution on a large, industrial scale, littering by almost everyone, entrenched corruption in the leadership (i.e. those who should have the greatest sense of patriotism), and so on. These things present challenges to the claim that Chinese love their country, and suggest that their patriotism has other causes.
- 20 Reflections of readers to an article about Jews and Israel on the popular Chinese website [www.sina.com](http://www.sina.com) on 22 December 2004.
- 21 Zhang Ping, "Israel and the Jewish people on Chinese cyberspace since 2002".
- 22 Loosely translated, *guān xi* means "connections". It is the process of social and business interactions; simply put, it refers to a time-honored custom of receiving and reciprocating favors or favor, of "doing the right thing" by family, friends, colleagues and contacts. Chinese social and business life revolves around this concept; everything is built on it, and few things – particularly in business – are possible without a "bank" of *guān xi*, so to be unconditionally received and accepted is quite remarkable.
- 23 For further discussion, see Chapter 5.

## 2 Food, identity, Jews and Chinese

The food stories told by Chinese and Jews can unravel deep complexities of ideology, culture and identity. One of the distinctive features of both Chinese and Jewish communities lies in the preparation of food. Jewish civilization is complex in that it covers a broad spectrum of stages in the process of evolution from an agricultural- and land-based culture – as portrayed in the Bible where cattle, grains and fruits, harvests and seasons were an essential part of daily life for families, economics, sacrifices and taxation – to its present axis as a culture of exile and landlessness where religio-legal structures articulated in the Talmud and rabbinic periods transformed a living culture into a constructed doctrine. This new incarnation melded a more or less forgotten land culture with ideology/theology, and reconstructed memory banks infused with the myriad of later teachings and traditions of communities that formed and re-formed and dispersed again over far-flung regions of the Diaspora, forging a living primarily from trade and manufacturing, and distanced from direct contact with agriculture. Food and eating habits have always revealed fascinating details of this saga but are often misunderstood owing to the complexity and the many transformations over the ages.

Unlike Jewish history, Chinese history has unfolded for the most part on Chinese soil. The great leaps and achievements of its culinary development took place mainly in China and have only been popularized in Western nations over the last few generations. In his book *The Food of China*, Professor Eugene Anderson surveys the achievements of Chinese civilization in regard to the growing of food, its production and uses, and the preparation of food, which, he postulates, are disproportional, impressively diverse and imaginative, and also part of the essential make-up of Chinese people, “the basis of the State and as fundamental not only to individual well-being but to the enjoyment of life”.<sup>1</sup>

The main question in this work is to understand how food contributes to the identity of the two nations. In so far as Chinese are in their own land, it is incontestable that food is of primary significance and that it is an expression of the things that are different and unique about China. The processes leading up to the serving of food on a Chinese dinner table are entirely different from how they are in Europe and how they are experienced in

contemporary Judaism. A trickier question relates to what happens when Chinese leave the contextual circumstances of their food preparation process, i.e. immigrate to a Western country. How then does food play a role in their identity, and for how long can this relationship between food and identity endure? It is here that the departure from Judaism is most pronounced, as Jews have a habit of developing rituals surrounding food, passed down through generations, even in relation to cuisines not traditionally within the Jewish culinary framework.

China's cuisine interplays with the meteorological climate, the economic climate, the availability of grains and other foodstuffs, government policy, individual liberties, and the evolution of Chinese national and regional identity. The uniqueness of a cuisine, the method of preparation and types of ingredients used have been known to contribute to the elevation in stature of a family, a village, a region or a province vis-à-vis the rest of China. Some of the major characteristics of Chinese minorities and regional differences are recognized via the food factor. Food, regional identity and belonging are immutably interlinked. Within China, the growing of food and preparation techniques have been preserved over many generations, centuries and even millennia. However, Chinese cuisine, outside the borders of the Middle Kingdom, takes on a different role and significance. As Chinese immigrate to Western countries, the dynamics that animate the food factor change. The role cuisine plays in preserving the identity of Chinese migrants in Western countries is important; but, over a generation or two, Chinese migrants tend to lose their dependency on their own style of food, adopting other cuisines – and, as they do so, not only does their food culture blur, but their entire identity as Chinese also fades.

### **Food and trans-generational identity**

The issue of overseas Chinese identity is larger than the question of Chinese cuisine, but it is none the less directly related.<sup>2</sup> The propensity for Chinese identity to survive over more than a few generations via culinary practices is yet to prove itself effective. In fact Chinese quickly assimilate into the host countries to which they immigrate. Over two or three generations any cultural memory from their ancestral place of origin tends to have disappeared into oblivion. There is little evidence of a Chinese Diaspora culture surviving over more than a few generations without the continual reinforcement of newer immigrants. So far as they have done so, food has been an important factor in the preservation of the overseas Chinese identity, but even the culture of food (ingredients and preparation) alone is too corporeal to resist the winds of time and change, and to form a self-perpetuating and continuously renewing Chinese community surviving over many generations.

By way of juxtaposition, articulated further below, it is manifestly clear that the Jewish story is the opposite. Through its specific and very different conception of food and its strong connection to traditional culinary habits,

the Jewish Diaspora has been able to form trans-generational traditions and preserve identity for generations, indeed centuries.

The Chinese method of food preparation, with all its diverse manifestations and ethnic variations, is one of the most important components of Chinese Diaspora identity. Political, religious and ideological persuasions are not key formational factors in the Chinese identity; food, however – ingredients, preparation, presentation, even method of ingestion – is a common cultural expression permeating people's daily lives.

Amongst overseas Chinese, this habit continues so long as there is a connection to the tastes, access to the raw materials, and a will to eat within the group context that Chinese food necessitates. Usually the region of origin is an important part of overseas Chinese identity; while this relates to the dialect spoken, it also relates to the types of food prepared and the types of food-stuffs and spices preferred in the region. First-generation Chinese migrants will preserve this culture, and in many cases it filters to some degree through to children of migrants; after which it seems that identity through this conception of food is no longer sustainable.

### **East–West culinary axis**

Chinese food preparation/dining ritual provides one of the most important distinguishing axes between East and West. I discuss this in greater detail in a forthcoming book, *A Philosopher's Observations of Modern China*. The genius, for example, of simple wooden chopsticks as successful implements in the preparation and eating of food tells a lot about how the Chinese relate to food. This technique precedes, by thousands of years, the Western technique of using metal knives and forks. Its success, and continual usage over millennia, has played a pivotal role in the determination of the Chinese food story. While Western practice involves cutting and dicing food on the plate whilst in the act of dining, made possible with the use of relatively expensive metal instruments developed after the Bronze Age, the Chinese use of wooden sticks well pre-dating that period precluded the potentially harmful possibility of eating large pieces of flesh or picking up bulky pieces of whole vegetables, and necessitated a pre-preparation stage of cooking and dicing into small mouth-size pieces, which were served in communal bowls intended to be picked up gently by the sticks by the large community (or family) of diners.

The serving of food in communal bowls, where diners continually pick food from them, as opposed to the Western practice where food is served on to larger individual plates, has interesting origins. Believed to have been especially popular in the Tang dynastic court, the intention was to provide, on the one hand, a large variety of dishes and, on the other hand, to assure the individual diners of the option to control the amount of food they consumed and the types of foods they wished to eat, so as not to coerce people away from their dietary preferences. This has gracefully facilitated a multicultural culinary experience accommodating the requirements, peculiarities and

preferences of Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, vegetarians and others to eat and feel welcome at Chinese feasts, and in many respects represents a highly sensitive and libertarian approach to dining.

Additionally, it facilitated a warmer group dynamic as participants shared in the communal food bowls using chopsticks that could access the food with one hand with significantly more ease than with knives and forks, which required two hands, and demonstration of presence when reaching over to take food. The presentation of many dishes leads to the assumption that food was prepared for large groups of people (the extended family unit, not just the nuclear family) who ate together rather than in small groups or alone.

Inferred from this is an orderly group dynamic developed early in human history, cooperation in the food production process, and a significant set of subconscious habits and conscious rituals developed around eating. The use of distinctive implements (bowls, spoons, sticks), table manners, seating order, atmosphere at the table and order of ceremony suggest that the Chinese eating experience was and remains a central, even quintessential, part of the Chinese lifestyle and an important source of Chinese identity.

Chinese are reserved about the food they consume. They generally do not like to experiment with other styles of cuisine, and Chinese travelers abroad are renowned for frequenting Chinese restaurants and finding it difficult or unpleasant to eat foreign food (but this phenomenon is under great threat with the insidious presence of the Golden Arches and the highly recognizable bearded face of the Colonel spreading at an alarming rate). Whether this preference relates to the Chinese palate or to the manner of presentation and method of eating requires more investigation.

While high-end Chinese cuisine is popular in the West, day-to-day Chinese cooking is not received with as much enthusiasm and has led to inter-racial friction and consternation by local residents in Western and European cities who are not accustomed to the smell of fried oil and the particular spices used. I have heard many complaints from Western students who hesitate to share lodgings with Chinese students because of the incongruity of their food preparation and ingestion habits. The frying and types of meats, and use of garlic and other foodstuffs, and the smell emanating from their kitchens have led to natural segregation. None the less Chinese nationals continue to do so; so perhaps the pressure to desist is what has caused the Chinese food factor to pale over a generational timeframe.

### **Chinatowns and the overseas Chinese food industry**

During the course of research I undertook in a number of Chinese Diasporas as part of preliminary studies designed to compare Jewish and Chinese Diasporas, I concluded that the food preparation industry, more than ethnicity, patriotism, religion or ideology, is at the core of the Chinatown phenomenon existing in major cities throughout the world. Food-related services more than anything else serve as the primary hub for the Chinese identity outside China.

This naturally necessitates and assumes the development of a complex food industry, and presupposes common economic interests as demand and supply of commodities fluctuate during festivals and other significant occasions; it creates economic and commercial opportunities, employment avenues for members of the community, economic leverage and influence for interest groups, leadership, politics, social dynamics, and the centralization of people and resources, and networks for communication and dissemination of information and news. The Chinese culinary culture is an important component of its economic prowess in China and around the world and it is also what lends it some degree of similarity (although using different techniques and mediums) to the Jews.

### **The Jewish axis: doctrine not taste**

Jews have a variously similar and dissimilar relationship with food. The dissimilar is that there is no defining Jewish food – the taste, texture, ingredients and preparatory processes have been adopted without a second thought from various other cultures. Not only have Jews adopted the cuisines of countries in which they have lived; they have even preserved the culinary traditions of those host countries to such an extent that a nation's most traditional foods, often forgotten by their own people, are discovered centuries later to be eaten in Jewish communities that lived in those countries and to have become considered as “Jewish” foods. So, for example, the Jewish community of Rome is known for distinct traditional Roman “Jewish” foods, which were later found to be authentic Roman foods, using the same style of cooking and specific ingredients but no longer eaten by Italians and forgotten over the centuries of change and migration from the city. Food has been an important factor in the preservation of Jewish identity, not so much by virtue of its taste, or its method of preparation or dining customs or utensils employed, but rather by its ritualization through kosher laws, festivals, celebrations and fast days.

That said, whilst food styles and recipes are highly flexible in Jewish communities, this is not to imply that food is not important or even axiomatic in Jewish community life. In several important ways, the similarities and extreme differences are indicative of the distinctiveness of Jews and Chinese and their respective identities.

Judaism is kept alive via religion, ritual and doctrine, whilst the Chinese have no legislative process of this type; indeed, the opposite – all is permitted between the chopsticks and the wok. Traditions and myths are alive and well, and are promulgated within the family unit which is the ultimate vehicle of expression and freedom for the Chinese. So, whilst the Jews use doctrine to manage their material lives, the Chinese use materials and ingredients to explain their doctrine. Both use the economy and ghettos, Chinatowns and the invariable economic industries that emerge from these.

The need for special ingredients brings the Chinese to Chinatown, to buy the things they cannot get elsewhere. Jews gravitate to their shops in the Jewish



ghetto, to the Jewish butcher and so on, to buy things that are exactly the same as in other places, just prepared under kosher supervision to ensure against contamination, forbidden ingredients, or processes unauthorized by the sages.

### **Religiously prescribed methods, not ingredients**

The rabbinic sages developed their own conception of how food should be viewed. Dietary practice and food consumption became a repository for memory and a medium through which the Jewish household was administered. Fasting became a vehicle for the commemoration of sad days, excessive and regular feasts were mandated for happy days, Sabbaths and festivals. Ritual slaughter of animals commemorated the sacrifices in the temple, and salting commemorated the work of the priests. Through a variety of technical blessings and prayers, the fruits and grains of the land of Israel were recorded into Diaspora memory. Blessings formulated for other foods not known to the earlier rabbis have been formulated to legitimize and assimilate other foodstuffs into Jewish culinary life. Food became heavily and integrally associated with doctrine, Jewish tradition and national memory, and served to unify the increasingly dispersed and disparate Jewish nation. The rabbinic conception of food embraced, and in many cases took priority over, the biblical conceptions and rules relating to foodstuffs, but the former was not erased; rather its principles, which emerged from an agricultural and national setting, were adjusted to accommodate a non-national, non-agricultural, more mercantile rural environment.

The rabbinic method reflects psychological adeptness and recognition that the Diaspora condition cannot (and perhaps should not) withstand the novelty of different foods, cooking methodologies and experiences. The style of food, the basic ingredients and raw materials and spices are all borrowed from the various local cultures. Perhaps this is born of a fear of offending local Gentile sensitivities or objections to the smells that non-local food may exude.

The way to ensure a Jewish dimension to the Jewish people's culinary habits is not via ingredients or specific techniques of cooking but via an arm's-length approach, indirectly dictating the manner in which food is handled – not in terms of content, but through ritual and legal requirements which guide the process. The major elements that “Judaize” local foods are surgical-like doctrinal and legislative incisions into the process of cooking, which proverbially baptize Gentile foods and create from them local Jewish cuisine. In so doing, the food is endowed with legitimacy and religious sanction from the Jewish sages, which in turn serves to perpetuate the kosher food industry, and sustain other wings of the Jewish community and its economy.

Shabbat and festival food is linked to law and tradition which sometimes govern the method of cooking and, at other times, the types of ingredients; but the religious instructions relating to food intervene on singular issues and do not affect the style, taste, method, and other dynamics of cooking. For



example, as fire cannot be ignited or used over the Sabbath day, food must be prepared in advance and, if it is served hot, must have remained on the flame overnight, without being stirred or changed, without ingredients added to it or otherwise tampered with until ready to eat. This necessitates a stew-like dish with ingredients that will tolerate great heat and long periods of time on the flame or buried in a hot pit or furnace. The Russian, Polish or German *cholent* and the Moroccan, Yemenite, Iraqi or Iranian *chamin* are different in every way except that both remain on the fire for long periods of time and are not stirred or tampered with until eaten. The ingredients, the meats, the cuts, the spices, the methods of stewing, the types of bowl, the types of fire and style of ovens, the methods of serving, the meal times and so on are all different. What unites them all is that they are all stewed for the Sabbath and are celebratory. These stews are the subject of elaborate discussions, gossip and comparison, and the focus of much deliberation before and after the Sabbath meal. Food indubitably keeps together the Jewish Diasporas and is a component of Jewish identity – but for different reasons from those of the Chinese. These different reasons lie at the base of two different civilizational axes.

Other examples exist, including the festival of Passover when *matza* is eaten and no leaven bread or flour and yeast is permitted. These very strict laws governing short periods of time during Jewish festivals have many similarities to Chinese traditions in that they are a point of reference and provide occasion for celebration, and a focal point of discussion and comparison. Chinese eat dumplings at the Chinese New Year to symbolize completion and renewal; they eat noodles to begin a friendship, to symbolize long and smooth relations, and many other foods to symbolize love, friendship, luck, vitality and other emotions.<sup>3</sup> A food may be chosen because its name sounds like the word for luck or success, or for other iconic reasons. But the Chinese, while being very traditional in their practices, using folklore and stories relating to the food, are distinctively non-doctrinal and non-legislative about their eating practices and ingredients; this seems to be one of the major differences in how they developed their traditional uses of food. They are disinclined to forbid or not eat a certain item, preferring to add a dish to the celebrations. Food is a positive reinforcement, not a deterrent. It is used to educate and inform the diners of historical events and is intended to become symbolic. It is a subject on to which national themes are projected and by which memory is preserved; but, unlike the Jewish use of food, it lacks doctrinal elements and, as mentioned earlier, has not survived outside China for more than a few generations, no doubt due, at least in part, to this lack of doctrine.

### **American Jews and Chinese food**

Jokes, stories and anecdotes, blogs, articles and academic papers relate to the predilection of American Jews for Chinese food and restaurants.<sup>4</sup> American Jews commonly confess their love for Chinese food, their sense of

connectedness to Chinese people and culture; indeed, a good part of the Jewish–Chinese encounter emerges through what has become an American Jewish tradition of dining at Chinese restaurants. New York Jews, especially known for this trend, are a factor as Chinese restaurateurs cogitate on the location of a new establishment, proximity to both Chinese and Jewish communities being of primary importance. Assimilated Jewish families will commonly go to Chinese restaurants for a family dinner on Friday night, the time of the traditional Sabbath meal. Much interest abounds around the noticeable phenomenon of Jews in America going to Chinese restaurants on Christmas Day.

How an ethnic group as diverse as American Jews can be so definitively associated with a love for Chinese food is a curious generalization, but the observation has been made in many quarters – by self-confessed Jewish Chinese food lovers, by scholars and observers of social morés, by Chinese restaurateurs. However peculiar, it seems to have some validity and requires explanation.

If there is an explanation for this, perhaps it is attributed to the otherness that Chinese cuisine offers Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and second and third generations brought up with Jewish food and culinary habits. Jews are known for their interest in exploring beyond the parameters, in active assimilationism, in venturing beyond their communities to experience exotic differences, and for being receptive to higher levels of tolerance and multiculturalism. Chinese cuisine in this respect represents an opposite, something unorthodox and different. Chinese food offers a completely new conception of food and tastes. Its preparation is different; the way of eating starkly contrasts with their own; it represents a carefree, guilt-free experience. Apart from being skillfully prepared, with attention to detail and unique and superb taste and artistry, it also offers the depth of another noble civilization's tradition, symbolism and wisdom in its own right. Perhaps it is not trite to take the view that Jews eating Chinese food is indeed a form of cultural exchange.

Various other reasons are posited. As the food is finely diced, the non-kosher ingredients (pork, shellfish or derivatives thereof) are not as recognizable, making it easier for guilt-ridden Jews to eat the forbidden foods or making “denial easier”.<sup>5</sup> Another theory put forward is that the “special attractiveness of Chinese restaurants had something to do with the fact that Chinese, unlike a number of other ethnic groups in the US, had no history of, or reputation for, anti-Semitism”.<sup>6</sup> Others argue that the food is cheap and good, and Jewish immigrants to the United States lived alongside Chinese immigrants, so it was natural for them to eat the food, which later developed into a tradition.

Others compare Chinese food to Eastern European Ashkenazi food: between “kreplach and wontons”; between “the core flavors and ingredients of Jewish and Chinese cooking (ginger, garlic, salt) dolled up with oil in a frying pan”; “chicken, cabbage, and celery, as well as copious amounts of garlic and onions”; the lack of dairy products in Chinese cuisine that makes kosher renditions all the more easy; as well as the close proximity of Jewish and Chinese immigrant communities in New York City (from 1880 to 1920) which may have resulted in shared culinary experiences and the sharing of

recipes.<sup>7</sup> This earnest attempt to identify the Jewish affinity with Chinese cuisine in the similarity of ingredients is somewhat contrived. Chinese food is diverse; its flavors and core ingredients differ between regions. Chinese food in America has mainly reflected Cantonese (southern) cuisine, but as migrants from other regions find their way to the United States other styles are slowly enticing on the American palate. The types of vegetables used vary depending on seasonal availability and price. Despite some vague similarities in ingredients and forms of food, the argument that this is the cause of the affinity is highly tenuous. What is overtly clear is that the reasons for the predilection fascinate Jews, and they are seeking to find answers in tendentious theories.

Social anthropologists Gaye Tuchman and Harry Levine are amongst those who argue that Chinese food may be less threatening (“safe treyf”) to Jews because of the way it is prepared and served, also suggesting, like others, that the ingredients are familiar to Eastern European Jews; Chinese cuisine does not use dairy products, making it more compatible with Jewish culture which does not mix meat and dairy. These arguments seem unlikely considering that concern for the separation of meat and dairy would not be foremost in the minds of Jews eating pork and shellfish.

A more compelling set of arguments they present includes the “cultural neutrality” of the Chinese in American society, making Jews feel comfortable in their presence. Eating in WASP establishments may make them feel less “secure about their position in the American racial and ethnic hierarchy”, and more scrutinized. Eating in Chinese restaurants lends them a feeling of empowerment and superiority as a settled ethnic group, whilst adding sophistication and multiculturalism to the experience. They do not need to explain their conduct or their requests, the Chinese are not judgmental, and usually the Chinese cannot distinguish between Jewish and Gentile patrons. There may also be a sense of fraternity, being that both are immigrants and neither is Christian. Jessica Carrew-Kraft quotes Phillip Roth’s novel *Portnoy’s Complaint*: “the only people in the world whom it seems to me the Jews are not afraid of are the Chinese”. Noting that Jews seem to feel at home – indeed, feel superior – dining in Chinese establishments, she remarks: “The only place where it is ‘kosher’ for the Portnoys to eat non-kosher food is at Chinese restaurants”.

Tuchman and Levine summarize:

Chinese food was attractive to Jews in part because its ingredients were somewhat familiar, and because it did not instinctively repel. . . . Jews were also attached to Chinese food because they perceived it as sophisticated, non-Christian, and a bargain. In subsequent generations, these associations then became overlaid with memories of family meals in Chinese restaurants – where, after 1950, New York Jewish families ate far more often than they did in Jewish restaurants. In different ways, for different reasons, for four generations of New York Jews, Chinese

restaurant food has continued to be part of what Federico Fellini called “the soft and gentle flavors of the past”.<sup>8</sup>

Jews construed Chinese restaurant food as being cosmopolitan, while their children construed it as being sophisticated and urbane. After several generations it became a Jewish custom, daily life and self-identity of New York Jews to eat Chinese. So much so that some Jews, who wish to remain at arm’s length from their Jewish or family origins, will not eat Chinese food because it has too many “Jewish” associations.

What is also likely to be a reason for the Jewish attraction to Chinese food is the underlying invisible environment that is evoked by Chinese table culture. Chinese food preparation reflects traditionalism. As explained earlier, the many dishes and the preparation process suppose that many people will participate in the meal together, so the environment is convivial to groups or families who share communal dishes. This complements the dynamics of Jewish families, and what Jews perceive as a festive and traditional feast is for traditional Chinese just an ordinary home-cooked meal.

An interesting question is raised: How can Jewish identity be preserved through Chinese food? “This practice goes against the general sociological understanding that ethnic groups form their identities out of their ‘traditional’ customs.”<sup>9</sup> Tuchman and Levine answer this by focusing on the meaning that Jews project on to food. They suggest that ethnic cultures in general and Jews in this context are projecting “socially constructed meanings [which] become the raw materials for new cultural creations”.

Boston University anthropologist Professor Merry White studied the phenomenon as it relates to the huge attraction Japanese have for Italian cuisine; her theory propounds that it is motivated out of a nostalgic image of a simple village life in the Italian countryside, “ideal and sentimentalized” with “grandma cooking in the kitchen”, which Japanese, living stressfully in a highly modernized society, long for. If we apply White’s theory to American Jews eating Chinese food, we may begin to wonder “if there is something similar at work in the Jewish imaginings of the Chinese, and perhaps the Jewish engagement with Chinese culture allows for a revision of Jewishness, or for a Jewish rebellion”.<sup>10</sup>

It goes even further than that. There seems to be an almost fetish appeal amongst secular Jews to seek “the other”, a phenomenon tied to Jewish universalism and even messianism.<sup>11</sup> The Chinese have traditionally been perceived by Jews as the “penultimate other”, a source of curiosity, interest and respect. The Chinese represented a civilization of its own, independent, without a need for or reliance on others; it was in many ways a source of inspiration and perhaps the mirror image of what Jews were and would like to be. Some of the foremost collectors of Chinese art and crafts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were German and Russian Jews, and one of the leading archeologists to discover ancient Chinese libraries and remnants was a British Jew, Sir Aurel Stein. Spinoza and Manasseh Ben Israel mention China in their writings.

For modern Jews, partaking of Chinese cuisine may well be a token expression of universalism, a unique form of Jewish assimilation, but this assimilatory process occurs using formats familiar to Jews, i.e. in a ritualized way (discussed more below), with the family, and on specific days or dates – for example, on Christian holidays and Sundays when the host nation was at church. Though transgressing the laws of *kashrut*, it is done in a traditional way, “creating a ritual context that might serve to alleviate the guilt induced by eating non kosher food”.<sup>12</sup> In expressing a fused secular relationship to Jewish identity, as Kraft puts it, “eating Chinese has become a statement of alternative participation in the gentile world order”; ironically, in doing so, American Jews have fermented a trans-generational (over three generations) identity and socio-family memory associated with Chinese food that overseas Chinese have been unable to achieve over the generations they have lived in foreign nations.

Kraft sums it up in an interesting observation about the religious/traditional attitude with which Jews relate to Chinese food:

Jews have effectively ritualized the Chinese meal and made it an integral part of modern Jewish life. Many Jews say they mastered chopsticks before they learned the Hebrew alphabet. Sunday morning dim sum and Christmas dinner at the Szechuan House not only provide a refuge for Jews during Christian holidays, but also allow Jews to express their Jewishness in a manner that is fun and somewhat transgressive.<sup>13</sup>

The sense amongst these Jewish diners that they have been exposed to a genuine Chinese encounter is palpable. The disproportionate level of American Jewish tourism to China seems directly related to this feeling.<sup>14</sup> Jewish tourists seem to feel a natural sense of kinship, familiarity and even a sharing of tradition, born of their culinary experiences in Chinese restaurants abroad. Needless to say, Chinese cuisine in the restaurants abroad bears scant resemblance to that in China, and the people they encounter are not immigrants but citizens in their sovereign homeland, the dynamics of their lives being very different; hence the encounter is dissimilar. None the less, the goodwill of the guest creates an illusion of kinship, a positive beginning for enhanced Jewish–Chinese relations.

### ***The River Elegy, food and liberty***

*Han* Chinese, the majority ethnic group in China, are typically agriculturally based. An important source of the Chinese conception of food is grounded in the historical dependence on the Yellow and Yangtze Rivers, which provided constant year-long water supplies to large tracts of land. Although this came with other problems, such as the threat of flooding and the necessity for river management, the secure knowledge of a steady, never-ending supply of water for crops must have had great psychological comfort value, and

certainly would have had implications for the Chinese conception of food and its management. Many have virtually worshipped the river, or at least it has struck a profound chord in the Chinese consciousness because of its inviolable connection with food supply. Myth has it that the first emperors of ancient China rose to power by their initiative in responding to the challenges of the river – building canals, dredging and controlling flooding. The entire body of Chinese hierarchical structures and ethics arguably grew out of the reality of the river and the necessity to administer it as a key to people's survival. The Chinese response to the challenges of prevailing weather and climate conditions was to secure the integrity of the river by uniting under a hierarchy that could achieve this. Chinese peasants (eagerly or reluctantly) agreed to limit their own freedoms; they accepted the rule of a succession of demanding and despotic emperors, furnished them with manpower, resources and skills, sent children to their army and their schools to be trained for imperial bureaucracies and any other duties that may have arisen – primarily (or at least originally) for the maintenance of the river. The emperors in turn trained technocrats, engineers and armies of builders to make sure the river did not flood. Failing to do so, an emperor's authority, popularity and taxable income would be undermined. With power and resources, imperial domination of China thrived, and a hierarchy was formed which would bind the people to the ruler with a heavy yoke.

Responses to the geographic and economic realities of the Land of Israel were different from the response of farmers living along the Yellow River. Living in dry and desert regions, with no rivers and no year-long sources of water, Israelites were dependent on seasonal rain and dew as the only means of possible crop yields, and as a result they may have been more susceptible to the dependency on faith and prayer as an outlet for their uncertainties. These circumstances no doubt also spawned more practical responses, including innovative methods of storage, processing and preservation of foods, and greater emphasis on trade and international diplomacy as a means of ensuring food supplies. As the Jewish Diaspora ventured further afield into different regions and agricultural terrain, the biblical–agricultural ethos was changed and adapted by later rabbinic thought. China's reality never needed to adapt as profoundly.

Just as China's ancient leaders and hierarchical structure emerged from an ability to control and administer the banks of the Yellow River, thereby protecting the source of the food chain, the Chinese people's creativity and liberty also came from their bare-handed and uninterrupted relationship with the river, facilitating productive tilling of the land, and from the plethora of crops harvested in the fertile basins and river deltas. For the *Han* Chinese peasants, primary producers in the main and not traders of commodities, being poor so not having sufficient money to buy other products, the sum total of their quality of life and dignity depended on what they were able to bring forth from the ground. Likewise, the ability of an individual, together with his extended family, to draw water from the river, to irrigate effectively

and till his land, to plant seeds, and finally to harvest, was the key to his individuality, his personal freedom and status. For Chinese people, food, therefore, represents a deep and almost primordial symbol of freedom and personal empowerment.

Some contemporary Chinese scholars have observed with scorn the “Chinese Restaurant Syndrome” – accusing overseas Chinese of merely opening up modest shop-front restaurants in European and American cities instead of setting up large corporate businesses or becoming professionals. Considering the above insights into the place, power and symbolism of food in Chinese society, perhaps the relationship with the production of food may appeal to a profound sense of personal liberty and represent freedom, and is not necessarily a shameful and parochial lack of ambition.

### **Conceptions of food**

It seems that Jews and Chinese had, in their ancient homelands, an agricultural reality in common, reflected in the development of a similar calendar taking into account the planting and harvesting periods and seasonal characteristics. While in some instances the responses to the agricultural reality were the same, over time they bifurcated and developed radically different perceptions.

Early Hebrews developed doctrines and concepts of ritual purity, sacrifices of every major grain and of animals, a tax system of the harvests which would finance the temple, the Levitical education system and the centralization of the nation in its capital, Jerusalem. The food industry became a form of societal management and individual control which later, after Jerusalem was destroyed, was reinterpreted as a component of Jewish spirituality.

Chinese conception of food is in many ways the opposite. Food preparation perhaps represents the most basic human right for Chinese, an expression of family and ethnic difference, an art, a source of variety, individualism, family glory, honor and respect, hierarchy and economic status.

The most basic dietary rule for the majority of Chinese is “eat and keep alive”. A Chinese saying, either expressed cynically or with great earnestness, runs along the lines “food is the heaven of the masses”.<sup>15</sup> This may depict the desperate need of peasants for food to stay alive, or the obsession that food has in the minds and souls of Chinese farmers, and/or the great love affair and spiritual relationship that Chinese have with cuisine. The Confucian conception of “heaven” is the closest idea that Chinese have to the Western conception of “God”. This may imply that everything is legitimate and warranted in order to make food.

So what is clear is that Jews and Chinese respond to food in variously similar and different ways. A possible formula to describe the Jewish perception of food could be: food, family, ritual, and a sense of tradition. The Chinese perception of food involves: food, family, and expression of personal liberty.



## Food and health

Other Chinese conceptions and considerations concerning food include the elaborate system of Yin Yang, which navigates the principles of proper combination and separation of food (and in other cultural arenas) in what may be considered culinary aesthetics, such as distinguishing between hot and cold foods, hard and soft, spicy and mild, combination of textures and so on. These principles inform the discipline of the medicinal and health benefits of food, which influence the types of ingredients used. The economic factor always plays a role; for example, rice is eaten at the end of a meal so that, in the event that there was not enough meat, all can fill up on the staple grain.

These principles are in as many ways comparable to as they are different from Jewish conceptions of food, which also separate foodstuffs (and other separation requirements, such as the growing of different grains together – *kelaim* – and the wearing of fabrics from different materials together – *shatnetz*). For example, Jewish law prohibits the mixture of meat and milk products, which some argue is motivated by health considerations, while others attribute it to the symbolic sensitivity to animals “not to cook a lamb in its mother’s milk”. Whatever the interpretations are, it is evident that both civilizations have developed techniques to manage food, but Judaism developed hyper-selectivity and micro-management of the details through theological and doctrinal methods, while Chinese preserved their principles through continual cultural practice.

Notably absent is the lack of any significant health consideration in Jewish cooking, which is an important element in Chinese culinary traditions. This is not to say that Judaism and Jewish food do not make any allowances at all for good health practices: the prohibition against eating certain animals – pigs and rabbits for example – and crustaceans, as well as the prohibition against consuming blood and, as mentioned, the separation of meat and milk recorded in biblical law may indeed have their genesis in ancient health considerations.

The rabbinic mandate to check a slaughtered animal for imperfections – perforated lungs, broken limbs and so on – may also have been partly motivated by health considerations. Whatever the essential motivation, the ability to ensure that the practice continued over generations could only be secured when enshrined in religious terminology, and concern for ritual purity and holiness.

This point may be more strongly made by noting the pre-eminence of Jewish doctors throughout history – from God himself, who claims “I am God your healer (doctor)”, to Aaron the High Priest who incorporated health and sanitary measures into the laws attributed to him in the Bible, to the long list of medical practitioners who were also rabbis and religious legislators in Talmudic, post-Talmudic, medieval and modern times. In their writings the contention that healthy food and eating habits were an important part of good and dignified living is apparent. None the less the legislation on issues



relating to kosher standards and food fit or unfit to eat was never based on health-related criteria, but rather on religious and ritualistic arguments. There seems to be a clear recognition that the way traditions enter the national memory is not via medicinal, rational or cultural acknowledgment but via doctrine. This represents an important difference in the ways that Chinese and Jews have managed and preserved their culinary memories.

Ironically, kosher food can be extremely unhealthy and still entirely kosher. Jews can maintain a strictly kosher diet whilst at the same time eating excessively unhealthy food. The health-kosher correlation is unfortunately not presently part of the *halakhic* religio-legal constitution of Jewish food and in many respects could borrow from the more naturally bound culture of healthy eating of Chinese.

Traditional Chinese food and eating habits, on the other hand, present a high benchmark for healthy living. Fresh vegetables, measured portions of vitamins, protein and roughage are part of a normal Chinese diet. Chinese always, or at least usually, separate protein from carbohydrates. Chinese food embraces the entire spectrum of Chinese life. Many foods, many styles, ingredients, spices, teas and herbal supplements exist; a greater diversity of ingredients can be found in Chinese cuisine than in most others. This is not tradition dictated by rules, legislation or doctrine as it is in the Jewish practice, but rather through cultural internalization of wisdom and understanding of how food functions and combines, and how bodily functions respond, and the intact progression of this wisdom over the generations of farmers eating from their produce. Another example of this is how Chinese routinely eat three meals a day, drink tea, and avoid fats and dairy produce.

The associations of greasy and unhealthy Chinese food eaten at unearthly times of night while watching television or playing video games is a product of the foreign “fast food” culture of Western nations and has little to do with Chinese cuisine. Even though food is presently plentiful in modern China, and middle-class Chinese eat unsparingly, and some may say to excess, particularly at business dinners and feasts, weight and health do not seem to be affected. In times of plenty, Chinese food incorporates ingredients with natural medicinal benefits, not consumed for health but within a food culture born of experience and in response to the environment. The plague of obesity hitting Chinese cities, particularly amongst the young, is due to the influx of fast-food franchises and the impact of Western values and lifestyles on Chinese habits, and also to the higher standards of living affording the acquisition of cars as a means of transport, replacing the age-old methods of walking or bicycle-riding and of computers resulting in increasingly sedentary leisure-time activities.

Many foods presently in the West are of *Han* Chinese origin even if they do not credit China for this distinction. However startling the lack of food taboos in Chinese cuisine may be to the Western mind and palate, the intimate relationship of Chinese with the entire food-production process, their spiritual relationship with food “as heaven”, has placed them as world leaders in conceptualizing the uses and preparatory styles of food.<sup>16</sup>

The food story is in many ways as central to Chinese as it is to Jews, as similar as it is different. Just as Jews have influenced other societies, they have also been profoundly influenced. In this respect, too, Chinese are undergoing a similar process. As their culinary traditions influence and inspire other nations, Chinese people, both in the motherland and those who live abroad, as well as Chinese food are undergoing profound change and being influenced by their interlocutors, perhaps more to their detriment than to their benefit.

### **Confucius on food**

Needless to say, there were distinct social strata in traditional Chinese society, with the vast majority of peasants struggling to survive, and a small portion of the ruling class, the extended royal family and the Confucian intellectuals, who served as administrators and bureaucrats, sufficiently moneyed to be sensitive to the affairs of the palate. Their food and way of cooking attained high degrees of sophistication. The most basic principles of the élite attitudes to food are expressed in the classics of Confucius and Mencius; whilst not everyone enjoyed these standards, their influence on Chinese life made their sentiments benchmarks for anyone aspiring to achieve rank and status.

Stated concisely, in Chinese cuisine food must be tasty, healthy and well presented, and great care is exercised to ensure this fundamental requirement. For example:

The master said referring to a gentleman. . . . There is no objection to his rice being of the finest quality, nor his meat being finely minced. Rice affected by the weather or rotten, he must not eat, nor fish that is not sound, nor meat that is high. He must not eat anything discolored or that smells bad. He must not eat anything which is overcooked nor which is undercooked, nor anything which lacks its proper seasoning. The meat that he eats must at the very most not be enough to make his breath smell of meat rather than of rice. As regards to wine, no limit is laid down; but he must not be disorderly. He may not drink wine bought at a shop or eat dried meat from the market. He need not refrain from such articles or food as ginger sprinkled over them; but he must not eat much of such dishes.<sup>17</sup>

And also:

In his staple cereals, he did not object to them being polished, and in his dishes he did not object to the food being cut up fine.<sup>18</sup>

### **Hyper-liberal versus hyper-selective**

Another curious dissimilitude between Jews and Chinese is in their respective conception of what particular animals and foodstuffs may be used for food.

Even though it is rare for any culture to eat every foodstuff without limit or rules, Chinese come close to demonstrating the least inhibitions in culinary intake and uses.

Chinese will eat almost anything; Jews are hyper-selective about what they eat. Chinese love and celebrate pigs, monkeys, dogs, rats, bears, snakes, crustaceans, beetles, frogs, spiders; they are all part of the expansive Chinese cuisine and many of them are celebrated in their calendar as symbols of life and luck. Some animals are nearly extinct because they were delicacies throughout Chinese history and, to only a marginally lesser extent, still are. Despite, or some suggest because of, their all-embracing menu, Chinese history has been dotted with episodes of starvation. Jewish kosher laws, in contrast, strictly prohibit many of these, narrowing the allowable to fish with fins and scales and domesticated animals with split hoofs that chew the cud and regurgitate their food through several stomachs.

In times of great poverty, famine or hunger in China (as experienced in several periods throughout history, most notably from the 1950s until the 1980s during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution until economic recovery under Deng Xiaoping), Chinese seldom ate livestock. Pigs were the exception because they could be enclosed in a sty close to living-quarters, were easy for peasants to feed with agricultural waste and did not require much attention. Other livestock, horses and cows, which were indispensable to farmers and peasants as they went about their work, were not raised to eat or for their milk. The limited consumption of dairy products in Chinese cuisine is also born of economic realities rather than of squeamishness or cultural inhibitions (and also due, in part, to a higher incidence of lactose intolerance than amongst Western people). Beetles, rats and frogs, although not dominant on the Chinese menu, provided good supplements in times of shortage; peasants considered themselves lucky to find these small edible "treats" while they were out and about working and did not have qualms about eating them, such that eventually they became delicacies, even when shortages were eliminated. In contrast, many of the other (non-*Han*) Chinese minorities were historically nomadic, but later settled down and began to raise herds and livestock; the menu of these minorities bears a strong resemblance to that of many Western nations, with beef, mutton and dairy produce dominating their table.

### **Cruelty to animals**

Chinese, at least peasants, are not squeamish about the means of slaughtering their food. Animals are killed in whichever way possible. Going to a slaughterhouse or to a fishmonger in modern China, one may be daunted by the lack of sensitivity as animals and fish are cruelly killed, or not killed at all, before being eaten.

Eating the raw flesh of animals, including monkeys, fish and crustaceans, sometimes even alive, is considered by some to be the ultimate delicacy, the

indulgences of the rich and powerful. The consumption of the blood of an animal is also considered to be a delicacy and done without compunction.

However, the more extreme forms of cruelty to animals, i.e. eating them alive, is frowned upon by many Chinese and has a pejorative name: “torturing eating”.<sup>19</sup> This may be informed by the sentiments expressed by Confucius and people of the scholarly tradition who are ascribed as being more sensitive to animals, for example:

*Confucius*: “The Master fished with a line, but did not use a net; he used an arrow and line, but did not shoot at roosting birds.”<sup>20</sup>

*Mencius*: “If you do not interfere with the busy seasons in the fields, then there will be more grain than the people can eat; if you do not allow nets with too fine a mesh to be used in large ponds, then there will be more fish and turtles than they can eat; if hatchets and axes are permitted in the forests on the hills only in the proper seasons, then there will be more timber than they can use. When the people have more grain, more fish and turtles than they can eat, and more timber than they can use, then in the support of their parents when alive and in the mourning of them when dead, they will be able to have no regrets over anything left undone. This is the first step along the Kingly way.”<sup>21</sup>

These sentiments, although referring to sensitivity to animals, seem to be specifically focused on a rational and ecological perspective; not “shooting roosting birds” was a sensible approach to protecting against extinction. Mencius affirms this by relating sensitivity to animals and to trees to be rewarded by plentiful trees and food sources.

In another quote from Mencius, speaking of Confucius, a curious philosophical difference between Jewish and Chinese scholarly traditions emerges.

Once having seen them alive, he cannot bear to see them die, and once having heard their cry, he cannot bear to eat their flesh. That is why the gentleman keeps his distance from the kitchen.<sup>22</sup>

Though Confucius ate all meats cooked for him, he warned that a noble man should keep a distance from the kitchen.<sup>23</sup> Mencius interpreted this to mean that Confucius was merciful, that he could not bear to hear animals crying when slaughtered in the kitchen.

For the Chinese gentleman, noble feelings, mercy and empathy were personal; while he may have felt grief or empathy for the animal, the way he avoided it was to keep a personal distance from the undesirable act. While acknowledging that it existed, the scholar preferred to spare himself the personal discomfort, but did nothing to stop it and did not furnish disciples or the household with a better approach. The apparent resignation of hope, that their personal sentiments could not be shared or adopted by the rest of

the population, or even that this was unnecessary, represents a sharp departure from the attitude of the Jewish scholarly tradition.

Those who claim that, in respect to mercy towards animals, Jewish and Chinese sages were alike miss an important point. The principle of responsibility for others is a vital theme running through Jewish legislation; if a Jew were to be of the view that an act was wrong, unethical or sinful, he would be virtually duty bound to assert his will. The Jewish sages mandated with utmost urgency the implementation of techniques to ensure the status and respect of and sensitivity towards animals destined for the slaughterhouse, and they implemented their position with determination throughout all classes to the furthest extents of the Jewish people. It was considered so important a principle that it was included in the *Seven Noahide Laws*, the basic ethical principles for the entire body of humanity which Jews were legally required to teach to Gentiles.

They did not preserve their own personal preferences or avoid confronting the masses on the point. They did, however, use religion and faith as their technique, instead of the Chinese scholarly approach of employing rational arguments that pandered to their own material interests.

Other differences relating to the conception of treatment of animals include the rabbinic mandate to make a blessing before carrying out the slaughter so as to legitimize the slaughter and eating of flesh so long as it is carried out in a correct manner; quickly and without duress to the animal.

The comparative question of sacrifices made by ancient Jews and Chinese is also of great interest and no doubt reveals much about the conception of food, aesthetics, and the relationship between man and nature.

In stark contrast to Chinese preferences, biblical and rabbinic law requires that the blood of an animal never be consumed. So punctilious about this point, it is required that the animal be slaughtered at the point in the neck where the most blood will flow; and the flesh must be washed and salted several times. Eating of blood in any form is strictly prohibited. Likewise the eating of live animals is considered to be a grave transgression of the principles of humane (not just Jewish) ethics. These laws also made their way to early Christian communities and were considered to be part of the ethical heritage of the Hebrews.

### **Comparing the Jewish and the Chinese kitchen**

Another curious contrast of Jewish and Chinese food cultures is the economics of food preparation. Kitchen management processes have completely different working suppositions.

In the average mainland Chinese urban home, the kitchen is very small and enclosed; it is a preparation room only, and meals are not eaten there. There are few cupboards and storage areas, a small sink if any, and a fridge has only recently become common and then only in urban dwellings – it is not really fundamental to the kitchen or to the food preparation process and is still uncommon in farming households. The kitchen was often dirty, oily

and unhygienic. It was the place where animals were slaughtered, and where noises, smells and waste remained. Rules of sanitation are not guided by overarching doctrine or strict mandates. Quick washing of the pan and/or burning it with fire is considered to be cleaning. Hence the kitchen remained closed off, not used by guests and not considered to be a place for “gentlemen” or for family gatherings. Even in large and more modern homes, the kitchen remains relatively small and closed off from the rest of the house.

Chopsticks are easy and compact to store, as are the simple bowls most commonly used. Chinese rarely use ovens, or bake food. Food is usually prepared from fresh seasonal fruits and vegetables, purchased daily or when an opportunity arises. In earlier times, in a more rural environment, the stove fire was positioned in the courtyard (*hutong* and *si he yuan*) where it could be shared by different families and households. The preparation was done in the private space of the kitchen, and the public stove used for the cooking. Owing to the predictability of seasons and the abundant supplies of fresh fruit and vegetables, storage was not necessary and, lacking room, not convenient anyway. The nature of the produce was also such that, if stored in the prevailing conditions, it would rot or be eaten by pests such as rats or insects, or attract infections. Cabbage was one of a few vegetables that could be stored underground, in the backyard, without rotting, where it was placed during autumn and eaten throughout the winter. The unsanitary conditions and the types of food eaten may have been due to economic conditions, although this is often indistinguishable from cultural habits.

A traditional Jewish kitchen is conceptually different. Kitchens have been a traditional gathering-place for the Jewish family, or at least some of the family. The stove is a central part of the kitchen; ovens are necessary for the baking of bread for Sabbath and festivals. Many items of kitchenware and cutlery are discussed in detail in biblical, Talmudic and rabbinic works, especially how they are to be used on the Sabbath and how they are to be prepared, “koshered” in the event of contamination. Milk and meat consciousness dominate the cultural lives of Jews. Most kosher kitchens will have at least a milk and meat set of crockery and cutlery and cooking equipment – pans and pots and the like – and some may have a *parve* (not meat or milk) set, too. Most will have a set of crockery and cutlery and cooking equipment for Passover. This requires large storage areas.

For social, economic and political reasons, Jews have characteristically stored grains and other foodstuffs – perhaps a habit of traders and merchants, or perhaps born of fear of deprivation or emergency, or perhaps the impulse to hoard. Storage and size were necessary for this, too.

Either owing to the non-availability of kosher products (wine, vinegar, sweet-meats, pickled vegetables and so on) or because Jews manufactured and traded in these commodities, many products were made in the kitchen, necessitating a larger size, good hygiene and easy access.

The preparation of food for the Sabbath and for festivals is most likely to have been an important factor in the development of Jewish food culture

and also indirectly impacting on the preferred kitchen layout. Jewish law necessitates planning, pre-preparation and storage for Shabbat. Most Sabbath observers will begin cooking on Wednesday afternoons or Thursdays, and continue through to Friday, so preparation and storage space needs to be larger.

Animals are slaughtered and prepared by professionals away from the home, and only skilled personnel know how to do it according to law; hence the kitchen is free of the smell and waste of this process. Meat is salted to make it kosher, and in past times its availability made salting other foodstuffs possible – a method of preservation practiced over millennia. It has always been preferable to do most cooking in the private kitchen as shared furnaces and areas ran the risk of the food being contaminated by non-kosher ingredients. For similar reasons, eating is characteristically amongst the family in the home and not in common areas.

Sanitation is an obvious and inevitable outcome. The kosher kitchen is more hygienic owing to the absence of blood, the separation of meat and milk resulting in more order and cleanliness, and the need for the kitchen to be cleaned in honor of Sabbath and festival meals. The Passover requires complete and thorough cleaning as well.

The kitchen has always been a place for people to come together; the Talmud and legal codes mention the kitchen being a place where women gathered and talked. It necessarily, therefore, had to be larger and more user-friendly. The Western-style open-plan kitchen and dining room seems to be an outgrowth of this conception of the role of the kitchen in the life of the family.

## **Staple foods**

Another curious distinction yet sameness is the way Jews and Chinese relate to their staple grain. In biblical and rabbinic culture, bread was a basic staple. Eating it became a symbol for a meal; “breaking bread” was synonymous with relaxing, entertaining guests and being entertained in turn, and was symbolic of feast and celebration. The *challa* was a portion, or corner, of the bread ripped off before being baked to signify the tithe and the corners of the field that Israelites left unharvested for the poor to come and collect. Jewish law developed a series of laws, rabbinic injunctions and rituals surrounding bread: ritual washing of hands preceded by a specific benediction was required before eating bread; bread was always eaten with at least a little salt; a lengthy and elaborate benediction was recited after eating bread. The theological treatment of bread was on a par with (and in fact commemorative of) the sacrifices in the Temple. The Sabbath meal was especially an occasion for the celebration of bread, which was also called *challa* for reasons mentioned above. The act of eating bread almost encapsulates the pillars of Jewish diasporic religious thought. Bread was doctrinized to such an extent that an entire meal of meat, fish, grains, rice, noodles and cake can be consumed without it being complete as a legally constituted meal,



while only a small piece of bread was necessary for this to be said to have taken place. For example, religiously mandated feasts were required on the Sabbath, at festivals, at weddings and at other religious ceremonies. If bread was not included, it was not formally recognized as a meal. If only a morsel of bread, even the size of an olive, was eaten and nothing else, this was considered to be a complete meal.

Chinese view rice in a similar way, although without the legal constructs that Judaism uses. In many ways one can see the agricultural antecedents of the two cultures in these associations. For the purpose of regional foods and staple grains, China is divided into two parts, south and north, starting at a specific point of the Yangtze River. In northern China, the climate and soil are suitable for growing wheat, so the staple grain for northerners is steamed bread called *mantou*. In southern China, *mifan*, literally meaning rice but connotating “a meal”, is grown and is the staple grain. The phenomenon of northerners eating a lot of rice was made possible only after more effective transportation and delivery of goods was developed after the 1980s. Although China’s economic paradigm has to a degree shifted from rural to urban, from farming to manufacturing and commerce, and with increasing affluence rice or steamed bread no longer serve as the basis of meals, none the less the linguistic association between the staple and a meal remains.

Jews, who have moved from region to region, who have transformed from farmers to manufacturers to merchants to professionals, still refer to bread as their staple, even though the economic realities do not affect this as their associations are rooted in doctrine and tradition rather than in economic or circumstantial realities.

## Food and festivals

There is not a clear-cut social distinction between the Confucian élites and the ordinary people, and Confucian teachings have an impact on an ordinary family’s dining table. Even in remote areas, people’s life-style bears the hallmarks of Confucius’ teachings. During festivals, for example, Confucian philosophy describes how meals should be festive and joyful, and show a little abundance, and how people should fulfill their responsibility to be hospitable, for example when hosting a marriage banquet. Even poor families will try to add at least one more dish to the table on these occasions. In some cases, if families are too poor to put on a large feast, so as to not lose face, especially in front of so many people, and so as to not make the bride feel bad on her day of celebration, host families may put some fake dishes (wood carved in the shape of fish or meat) on the table. This custom still survives in many places in China.

Jewish celebrations are similarly required to demonstrate abundance, although this, too, is legislated. Foods – meats, fruits, vegetables and bread – that require a number of different blessings should be placed on the table. The sages encourage hospitality as a high virtue, and pious Jews will spend



their last pennies to ensure that the festivals are spent in dignity and guests are present at their table.

The comparative ways in which the festivals are performed and the foods eaten is likely to offer fascinating insights into the ways that the two cultures developed, too detailed for this work. Suffice it here to note that the respective existence of traditions in respect to the way feasts and celebrations are to be carried out reflects attempts to interpret and preserve ancient traditions within modernity, with food being an essential vehicle to this end.

## **On alcohol**

Chinese and Jewish conceptions of alcohol are interesting in their similarities.

While other peoples and civilizations (Arabs and Islam) forbid the consumption of alcohol, and some Christian denominations spurn it, and some secular nations have legalized it despite fearing its negative connotations, in the eyes of Jewish and Chinese cultures the consumption of alcohol is acceptable, endorsed and incorporated into cultural, ritual and (in the Jewish case) religious occasions.

As regards to wine, no limit is laid down; but he must not be disorderly. He may not drink wine bought at a shop. . . .<sup>24</sup>

The non-squeamish nature of the two worldviews points to other mechanisms in place to ensure that drunkenness and disorder do not become rife. In many respects this suggests a maturity of the culture, in that it feels secure with its ability to curtail the negative effects that invariably emerge from alcohol consumption.

## **On fasting**

It is curious that Chinese did not develop fast days. Other civilizations have done so, and the question why this did not find vogue in the minds of Chinese is interesting. It invariably relates to the attitude of Confucius to fasting:

The Master said, I once spent the whole day without food and a whole night without sleep, in order to meditate. It was no use. It is better to learn.<sup>25</sup>

For such measures to be instituted, they need the sanction and endorsement of the nation's scholars. The rational nature of the Chinese scholarly system did not see value in depriving oneself of basic necessities, but rather using what one had to maximize and perfect one's nature.

The absence of fasting in Chinese tradition reinforces the importance of "food as the heaven of the masses". To the scholars, the masses would be who they are, and the scholars could improve themselves through learning. The absence of food may have too many implications for Chinese honor and

liberty; the eating schedule is so fixed in the Chinese mindset that other habits are secondary. Chinese generally are very consistent about the times at which they eat, and it has been noted that irritability is common if food is not served on time.

Another argument postulates why it was ritually necessary to fast as Chinese had been fulfilling this *de facto* “duty” during regular periods of famine and starvation, so it would be deemed a gross violation. The gist of this point is that fasting was an “indulgence” of the wealthy who had the luxury of depriving themselves of food in order to contemplate, while impoverished Chinese peasants were not in this position.

Jewish law instituted several fast days for various reasons, one of them being to transcend or control the natural relationship one may have with food. While food is embraced and used in abundance to celebrate and enjoy life, the Jewish worldview sees that it must be regulated and controlled in all its major expressions.

There was, however, an appreciation for modesty of means and some degree of ascetism:

The master said, He who seeks only coarse food to eat, water to drink and a bent arm for a pillow, will without looking for it find happiness to boot.<sup>26</sup>

In this respect Jewish thought is divided. Some argue for a frugal existence, sufficient to subsist and serve God, while others view celebration of the material world, within an ethical framework, as testament to and celebration of the omnipotence of the divine.

## **Conclusion**

Through these similarities and differences the underlying dynamics of the respective civilizations are more observable.

The Chinese represent a real and living culture interactive with food and ingredients, nature and the rural way of life, together with family traditions and relatively simple economic paradigms.

Jews have a constructed “spiritual” or “ritual” code relating to food which does not introduce new or different ways of cooking, or offer original ingredients or spices, but rather asserts a religio-ritual management of foodstuffs, a set routine dictating how, why and where they are eaten, as pillars of Jewish identity. One of the more significant universal principles derived from this discussion may be the role that doctrine has played as a cultural preservative where rational or cultural mores lose their way or their poignancy.

Food is axiomatic to both nations; both preserve their respective ethnic identities through their culinary habits. The respective way this is done shows the genius of their cultures and illuminates how day-to-day activities such as eating symbolize so much more than we expect.

Although Jews and Chinese celebrate festivals at the same time – in the sense that they use a similar calendar system, mark the equinox and the solstice, celebrate the new and/or the full moon with festivals, commemorate the arrival of spring and the harvest festivals, and stage festivities imbued with historic and educational symbolism – because of their vastly different socio-political and economic circumstances they have come to mean different things.

Within Judaism, the agricultural component, though extant, has not been predominant since the Exile from Israel in the first century. China's traditional dependence on agriculture rendered its situation very different from those of the mercantile and professional nature of most Jewish communities. However, since the establishment of the State of Israel, and the agricultural revolution it put into motion, at least vis-à-vis the Jewish people whereby they were rejoined to the land and crop-growing and geographic dependence, a biblical-agricultural worldview has become increasingly poignant to Israeli religious life. Because of this, the significance of Chinese traditional attitudes to the land may have greater resonance and symbolic meaning. Conversely, the rabbinic technique of preserving identity outside an agricultural context may be of interest to Chinese reformers and to new urban dwellers who, while having little in common with rural life, wish to maintain their identity with their history and traditions, and seek frameworks in which to do so.

The potential meeting points as well as the stark differences continue to oscillate as the two nations, Jews and Chinese, encounter each other in the lanes and avenues of their respective marches on the roads of history.

## Acknowledgments

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## Notes

- 1 Eugene. N. Anderson, *The Food of China* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1988).
- 2 Larger questions of Chinese identity are discussed in Chapter 5.
- 3 The following are examples of Chinese foods prepared at festivals; they have many interesting comparisons to Jewish food and the way the sages educated through food symbolism. For example: *Jiaozi*, rounded dumplings eaten at the Chinese Spring Festival, symbolizes the end of the previous year and the beginning of a new year. Its pronunciation sounds like another word *jiao* ("cross") and *zi* ("midnight"), so it means the end of a day and the beginning of a new day.  
*Niangao* (sticky New Year cake, made of glutinous rice flour), also eaten at the Spring Festival, symbolizes a successful New Year. "Year" in Chinese is the same

as the pronunciation of “sticky” and also has the same pronunciation as “high”, “better” and “success”.

*Tangyuan/Yuanxiao/Tangtuan* (汤圆/元宵/汤团), rice dumplings, boiled sphere-like balls, made of glutinous rice flour stuffed with sugar and sesame or bean paste or pork eaten on the Lantern Festival (元宵节, Yuanxiaojie), symbolizing family reunions and happiness.

Sweet beans (糖豆, *Tangdou*), eaten at the Spring Dragon Festival (二月二节/春龙节), birthday of the god of earth. They are eaten in commemoration of the sacrifice of sweet beans to the god of earth in the hope of good weather, rain in its season and a good harvest.

Cold foods (冷饭), eaten at Cold Food Festival (寒食节 *Hanshijie*). On this day all cooking is forbidden, and cold food is eaten. This falls on the eve of Tomb-Sweeping Day and is often considered to be part of the Tomb-Sweeping Day. Cold Food Festival is popularly associated with Jie Zi Zhui, who lived in Shanxi Province in 600 BC. According to the legend, Jie saved his starving lord's life by serving a piece of his own leg. When the lord succeeded in becoming the ruler of a small principality, he invited his faithful follower to join him. However, Jie declined his invitation, preferring to lead a hermit's life in the mountains, together with his mother. Believing that he could force Jie out by burning the mountain, the lord ordered his men to set the forest on fire. To his consternation, Jie chose to remain where he was and was burned to death. To commemorate Jie, the lord ordered all fires in every home to be put out on the anniversary of Jie's death. Thus began the “cold food feast”, a day when no food could be cooked since no fire could be lit. With the passage of time, Tomb-Sweeping Day replaced the Cold Food Festival. The basic observation of Tomb-Sweeping Day is to remember one's elders by making a special effort to visit their graves, ashes or ancestral tablets. To make the visit even more meaningful, some time should be spent in reminding the younger members of the family of the lives and contributions of their ancestors, and the story of Jie Zi Zhui, who chose death over capitulation. The rites are very important to most Chinese, and especially to farmers. Many believe that, if the ancestors' spirits are not properly cared for, they will become hungry ghosts that can cause trouble for the living. Nowadays, the festival is also a patriotic day.

Chicken eggs (鸡蛋) are eaten on Tomb-Sweeping Day (清明节, *Ching Ming Festival*), a traditional Chinese holiday celebrated on the 106th day after the winter solstice. Tomb-Sweeping Day (清明节) falls between spring plowing and summer weeding. This festival has parallels in the English language: All Souls Day, Clear Brightness Festival, Festival for Tending Graves.

Glutinous rice with a filling, wrapped in leaves (粽子, *Zongzi*), are eaten at the Dragon Boat Festival (端午节, *Duanwu*, the fifth day of the fifth month of the Chinese lunar calendar), to memorialize a great poet and hero in the Warring States Period who committed suicide in the Miluo River when hearing that his nation, Chuguo, had been conquered.

Long noodles (面条) are eaten at the solstice festival (夏至节, *Xiazhi*), symbolic of the longest day of the year.

Moon cakes (月饼, *Yuebing*), made with a sweet bean-paste filling – golden brown flaky skin, round in shape, the size of a palm, like a full moon, and eaten at the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival (中秋节, fifteenth day of the eighth month of the Chinese lunar calendar) – symbolize family unity and perfection. The legend associated with the eating of moon cakes at the Moon Festival somehow resembles a Chinese Passover. In 1280 CE the Mongolians destroyed the Song Dynasty and controlled China, installing the Yuan Dynasty (1280–1368 CE). Under Mongolian rule, Chinese people were oppressed, persecuted and treated like slaves. Finally, the Chinese revolted during the August Moon Festival of 1368.

Because Mongolians do not eat moon cakes, the Chinese planned the overthrow of the Mongolians by sending secret messages in moon cakes. Chinese bakers were instructed to send to all Chinese households moon cakes containing a message to execute all Mongolians after the August Moon family gathering. Chinese families were instructed not to eat the moon cakes until the fifteenth day of the eighteenth lunar moon.

Soft double rice cakes (重阳糕, *Chongyang Gao*) eaten at the Elders' Day Festival (重阳节, *Chongyang*, ninth day of the ninth lunar month), symbolizing long life (*Gao* means "high", "long", indicating long life). According to the famous Chinese classic *Yi Jing* (*I Ching*), six and nine are both *yang* (of *Yin Yang*), i.e. positive numbers. Therefore, the ninth day of the ninth lunar month is a day to be celebrated as a Double Yang Festival. It is marked by family outings, especially walking to the top of a hill to admire the chrysanthemum flowers (*juhua*), by decorating houses with *Cornus officinalis* plants (*zhuyu*), by eating double-yang cakes, and by drinking chrysanthemum wine. In 1989 the Chinese government gazetted the Elders' Day Festival to encourage young people to respect their parents.

Eight-treasure porridge made of rice, beans, dates, walnuts, peanuts and other ingredients (腊八粥, *Labazhou*) is eaten at the Laba Festival (腊八节, the eighth day of the last month of the Chinese lunar calendar) to commemorate Sakyamuni, founder of Buddhism, and the attainment of revelation by practicing asceticism. He survived on one meal of porridge (*labazhou*) a day, hence it is eaten in his memory.

Soup dumplings (馄饨或米团, *huntun*; in North China *jiaozi* – dumplings; in South China rice-ball dumplings – *mituan*) eaten at the Winter Solstice Festival (冬至节, *Dongzhi*, twenty-second of the twenty-four solar terms) commemorating the shortest day in the year and a day on which ancestors and heaven are worshipped.

- 4 See, for example, Gaye Tuchman and Harry Gene Levine, "New York Jews and Chinese food: the social construction of an ethnic pattern", *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 22 (3): 382–407. Also <http://jeffweintraub.blogspot.com/2007/12/jewish-christmas-chinese-connection.html>, "Jewish Christmas – the Chinese connection", posted 24 December 2007, last viewed on 15 July 2008. Also Don Siegel, *From Lokshen to Lo Mein: The Jewish Love Affair with Chinese Food* (Jerusalem: Gefen Books, 2005).
- 5 See Weintraub "Jewish Christmas".
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Jessica Carew Kraft, "Don't ask, just eat", *New Voices: National Jewish Student Magazine*, last viewed 7 September 2008. And Siegel, *From Lokshen to Lo Mein*.
- 8 Tuchman and Levine, "Jews and Chinese food".
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Although I have made this point in other contexts, Jessica Carew Kraft puts it very well in "Don't ask, just eat".
- 11 I discuss this phenomenon in several of my previous works on Hasidism and sabbateanism, though in different contexts.
- 12 Kraft, "Don't ask, just eat".
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 See Chapter [to come].
- 15 (民以食为天).
- 16 See Anderson, *Food of China*.
- 17 *The Analects of Confucius*, trans. Arthur Waley (Ware: Wordsworth, 1996), 10: 6, 7, 8; andnd *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation*, trans. Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont, Jr. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1998).
- 18 (食不厌精，脍不厌细).

19 (虐食).

20 (钓而不网，弋不射宿).

21 *Mencius*, trans. D. C. Lau (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970) p. 51.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 55 (“数罟不入湾池，君子之于禽兽也，见其生不忍见其死，闻其声不忍食其肉，是以君子远庖厨也).

23 (君子远庖厨).

24 *Analects*, 10: 6, 7, 8.

25 *Ibid.*, 15: 30.

26 *Ibid.*, 7: 15.

### 3 The kosher industry in China: anatomy of a growing community

For many orthodox Jews whose diet is strictly guided by religious dietary laws known as *kashrut* or *kosher* the very idea of a kosher Chinese restaurant is enchanting and daring, conjuring food fantasies kosher but very unorthodox. As mentioned Chapter 2, this trend has spread around the United States; and American Jews, especially New Yorkers, enjoy a particular fascination with the kosher (and also non-kosher) otherliness of Chinese food.

For reasons described there, too, the otherworldliness associated with China is so unusual for the orthodox Jewish imagination that the prospect of a growing kosher industry in China is no less than risqué, although perfectly reasonable when it comes to cost benefits. The possibility of Chinese playing some role in the preparation of kosher food seems far-fetched. The novelty of kosher production plants in China is enough to shake the foundations of the orthodox mind. The incredulous question, “What is between the Jews and the Chinese?”, resonates throughout the Jewish religious world as something on the verge of humor: “What! The Chinese are eating gefilte fish and chopped liver?” “What the heck are they interested in kosher for? Soon they will want to be circumcised!” The absurdity of suggesting that Judaism is a source of interest to anyone else but Jews surprises and amuses the orthodox mind. But at the back of their thoughts the idea of kosher in China lends a serious twist to the prospect of a global *shtetle*, or Chinatown, and the economic possibilities have also crossed their minds.

#### **Kosher fundamentals**

Kosher animals (with split hoofs and regurgitating; including cows, sheep, goats) slaughtered (*shkhita*) in accordance with Jewish law (swift, painless cut to the neck, extricating as much blood as possible and accompanied by a blessing) and prepared according to Jewish law (checking for broken bones and signs of infection or holes in the internal organs, taking out certain sinews, thoroughly washed and salted to extricate blood) are *halakhically* (according to Jewish ritual law) kosher.

Kosher fish include those with fins and scales. There is also a strict prohibition on shellfish or crustaceans including lobster, crab, oyster and derivatives

thereof. Another fundamental of kosher food is the strict separation of meat and dairy products.

Other prohibitions exist against food cooked on the Sabbath or on religious holidays or prepared by Gentiles without supervision.

The kosher food supervising industry relates to ensuring that these standards are met. Certification came into existence less than half a century ago in order to accommodate modern industrial production of food. Until then, as long as food was cooked by someone trustworthy, it could have been deemed kosher. Today, apart from the slaughtering of animals, the lion's share of the kosher industry relates to checking on food production to ensure the basic raw materials either use kosher meat derivatives and appropriately separated dairy products, or are completely free of any meat and crustacean derivatives including gelatins, emulsifiers, fat and so on.

It is debatable whether Jewish law requires such cautious supervision of products which do not contain these derivatives; none the less, as the industry grew, and as micro-management became an integral part of administering major industries in the modern economy, the kosher industry learned to compete masterfully. The complexity of the industry does not deter the rabbinic supervisors, who have become adept at navigating their way, and in fact complements the complexities of the Jewish legal codes.

There are also many other potential components to kosher food that may be recovered from the archives of Jewish law to have relevance today, such as ethical standards, slave labor, cruelty to animals and so on.

Kosher certification has become an important factor in modern Jewish life. The identity of orthodox Jews is joined to kosher food labeling. It is also a highly lucrative industry. Today many communities have their own kosher supervising agents and organizations, and many families and even entire communities make their living from it. The rabbinic court of a local community endorses their rabbis and pious members to fulfill these duties in local industries. As the industry grows, those who benefit from it have sufficient motive to undermine its foundations. Reform of the industry, such as including modern ethical considerations, would receive little support, especially as the ritual underpinnings are already tenuous; reviewing would open a Pandora's Box of problems that have not been reviewed for centuries.

Kosher supervising practices have developed a methodology, have integrated and overlapped, and even complement the workings of national bureaus of health. In many cases they have also become a standard which is trusted by Jews and non-Jews alike.

### **The politics of kosher meat**

The slaughtering of animals and trade in kosher meat is one of the foundation stones of the local economy in Jewish communities worldwide. It has historically provided incomes for a range of community members. Small Jewish communities and/or individuals in distant and isolated regions, as long as



they feel any obligation towards religious practice, and as much as they require a rabbi (and perhaps even more), also require a *shokhet* (ritual slaughterer of kosher animals) and a kosher butcher.

The kosher butcher often has a virtual monopoly and, therefore, can arbitrarily set the price and determine the quality of meat sold. In times when transport and refrigeration were limited, this stranglehold was more absolute.

The rabbis or the communities who supervised or endorsed the process also profited from the industry either directly or indirectly. It was also the intuitive duty of a successful rabbi to steer core industries such as *kashrut* for the welfare of other wings of the community; for example, meat was given to feed *yeshiva* students, or those without jobs could work in the butchery, in supervision and in other aspects of the kosher economy. The Jewish district and kosher food, meat, bakeries and so on were interrelated.

A lot of room exists for currying rabbinic favor and maintaining special interests. The local rabbi or rabbinic court had the authority to grant (or not) certification to whoever it wished. On many occasions this was granted sparingly to protect existing monopolies. Only recently have competitive trade practices begun to influence the kosher market, and even today the politics of certification is renowned for its rancor. In the past, communities have been split, religious revolution fomented. An interesting episode (in nineteenth-century Turkey) demonstrates the levels of frustration as parts of the Jewish community of Ismir converted to Islam and/or began eating non-kosher meat in protest at the monopolies of the rabbinic leadership and special interests relating to the kosher meat industry.<sup>1</sup> Needless to say, kosher meat generates huge revenues and, with a captive market, needs little marketing or other media to ensure sales.

Owing to technical issues relating to slaughtering and to time-consuming difficulties in preparation of the hindquarter of the animal, many butchers slaughterers prefer not to use it, requiring it be re-sold to non-kosher producers, which injects other complications and mixed interests into the production process.

Due to these and other considerations, costs of producing kosher meat are much higher than for other meat. In small communities, where the slaughterer comes irregularly to prepare meat and the equipment is not as refined, the process is more cumbersome, and the costs can be even higher.

### **Introducing the Chinese authorities to kosher politics**

As China's economy matures, and hi-tech infrastructure is adopted and food production processes become more transparent, large international conglomerates are increasingly transferring their production to reap the benefits of cheaper labor and overheads. Since the late 1980s, the kosher industry has been supervising small factories and specific food items, and rabbis involved in this process have personally observed how China evolved from its infant stages, settling into a comfortable relationship, developing a working methodology with what has now become a food production giant.

The kosher supervising industry has, over the past several decades, also integrated into the major systems of Western food production, working in partnership with major international conglomerates in the United States and Europe. The next challenge is for it to interface with large Chinese systems. This is necessary so as to keep up with geo-economic realities and provide the necessary supervision and certification these multinational conglomerates require; and it is equally important for the Chinese authorities so as to demonstrate that they can negotiate the technical requirements of kosher standards and work with large international plants. There is a mutual interest for the dynamic to succeed.

The Chinese authorities are eager to demonstrate their food production abilities to the rest of the world. Food quality control has undergone profound change. China must demonstrate that its workers are skilled, its technology is adept, working conditions are hygienic and the food sources are pure.<sup>2</sup> A major advantage of hosting hi-tech international industries is that Chinese managers, workers and others involved in the industry become familiar with the more technical methods and modern machinery, and rapidly implement their knowledge within the domestic food production market. They are even incorporating their own experiences and innovations in this process and will soon become genuine leaders and perhaps even innovators. The revenue from the food production industry is significant. The priority of ensuring advanced food processing skills is a significant national interest to a country which has starved on various occasions for lack of planning.

These interests bring together an unusual mix of peoples, cultures and processes, including: rabbis and communist-atheist officials; *halakhic* (Jewish law) requirements and Chinese political and bureaucratic procedures; Jewish and Chinese cultures, and competing and complementary economic needs; Chinese plant managers, industrialists and food engineers with pious Jewish supervisors and talmudists. In many ways the burgeoning kosher industry in China is a test of the abilities of the two cultures to overcome the pitfalls of their respective attitudes, worldviews and bureaucracies to identify mutual interests. Government officials and business interests are happy to see this relationship grow as it contributes to China's integration and appeal to world markets.

Officials are less interested in accommodating the needs of the local Jewish community and local kosher industry, which is small, relatively insignificant and not related, in their minds, to the larger food industry of which kosher supervisors are a part. Accommodating religious sectarianism is not a priority for the Chinese. Jews are tolerated as an ethnic group, but not too much will exist to help more than what is expected by human rights and religious freedom standards. Much of the kosher food used in China still needs to be imported from abroad, which tests Chinese import laws which are designed to protect its food production markets. There is little motivation to allow Jews to bring in their own food when Chinese-produced food is so readily available.

Recently Chinese authorities gained some insight into the attention local kosher issues can draw, during the preparations to provide kosher food to

the Olympic Village. Not appreciating the primacy of rabbinic-supervised food for Jewish communal life, they experienced pressure from Jewish interests owing to a lack of special import permits and intensified inspections processes, and limitations on importing liquid foods on food supply flights. Supervisors could not get visas into China before the Olympics; delivery vehicles could not bring specific merchandise owing to restrictions on trucks under pollution emission regulations. Jewish interest groups, articles and blogs drew attention to these shortfalls, causing discomfort to the authorities charged with choreographing the logistics of what they hoped would be a perfect Olympic Games.

Airport authorities also experience problems as orthodox Jews entering China commonly bring with them hundreds of kilograms of canned and bottled foodstuffs, drinks and meats, including labels that already exist in China. Even kosher-labeled Coca-Cola is brought in this way. Authorities are unable to understand why these products are not bought in China, suspect racketeering and commonly refuse to allow it, causing arguments and frustration. This experience is intensified when it comes to large Jewish tour groups.

There is also some confusion when it comes to the question of who represents kosher (and general Jewish) interests in China. This question is likely to create problems in the future as the community grows and diversifies with different ideological and ethnic groups seeking to establish their own local infrastructure.<sup>3</sup> The tension is likely to flare up between the large American supervising authorities such as OU (Orthodox Union) which serve large food conglomerates, and the local community which is represented by Chabad interests and is developing its own certification brand using Chabad supervisors. Other Jewish groups entering the fray, including Sephardic interests representing the Syrian Community of New York and Israeli interests, are seeking pieces of the kosher pie, as discussed in more detail below.

For example, in the past, animals were slaughtered under kosher supervision in China and received export licenses – which may have developed into a thriving kosher meat industry. Mystery surrounds the exact events that resulted in the Chinese authorities ending the practice. It seems that the jealousies and economic rivalry surrounding various spheres of kosher influence, and infighting amongst the certification agencies that slandered and undermined each other to the Chinese authorities, caused concern. Unfamiliar with this style of bargaining, shocked by its rancor, and concerned that Jewish rumor mongering and internal politics would bring disrepute to the entire Chinese meat production industry, the authorities swiftly terminated their activities. The Jewish indulgence in criticizing, libeling and scorning each other, uncomfortably unfamiliar to the Chinese authorities, was not permitted to spread tentacles into the Chinese industry.

It was during this hiatus that the supervision of raw materials turned into a thriving industry. It is now a question of whether the slaughter of animals and production of a full-scale kosher industry will again be possible.

## **First base: local Jewish communities and local kosher consumption**

The Jewish community is the basis of the local kosher industry. As these have grown in cities in China, India, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, and other countries in Southeast Asia, the kosher industries have grown in tandem.

Kosher meat and bakeries are first requirements. In most countries, the process of certifying food products begins with the expression of interest from local Jewish community members who approach the company, who in turn agree to submit to kosher supervision. Alternatively a mechanism such as a kosher supervisory board is established, and food companies turn to it to seek certification. Members of the community can facilitate export and trade of the kosher commodities, and in this way it grows.

The kosher industry in China has several components and areas of development, including:

1. *Shkhita* for local consumption
2. Provision of kosher meat and products to Jewish residents and guests in China
3. Providing kosher meals for guests over Sabbath and festivals
4. Catering to Jewish tourists and tour groups
5. Providing services to kosher restaurants and industries such as El Al, Israel National Airlines
6. Supervision of raw materials for international food conglomerates
7. Ethical food standards image
8. Potential to develop *shkhita* for export
9. Strategic positioning of kosher authorities in the food production world, which is rapidly moving to China

China's circumstances are different in that the kosher raw material and product industry would exist irrespective of the existence of the Jewish community, sustained by large international food-producing plants and the needs for supervisors to provide them with certification to meet the international standards.

The local community is too small to warrant the personal attention of Chinese industry. There is unfortunately little direct contact between the Chinese producers of the foodstuffs and the local Jewish communities. Food products are not re-directed to the community. The packaged food used by the local Jewish community is, for the most part, brought into China from abroad. Even foodstuffs made in China on behalf of large corporations and with kosher supervision are often not directed to the local Jewish communities; ironically they are first delivered to their intended ports in the United States and Europe, to later find their way back to China, brought by Jewish travelers or residents.

None the less, as Jews live, visit and trade in China, they require a Jewish community setting and community personnel, and the kosher life of the residents will likely grow independently of the large commercial interests. The inherent interest in its growth, and finding factories to supervise and certify, is a business which is beginning to pay the wages of dozens of people who share their time between community needs and kosher supervising, lending important critical mass to a fledgling community. In this way China's Jewish communities in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen have grown and become vibrant.<sup>4</sup>

Local kosher restaurants or kosher food outlets and catering services have opened to cater to residents, tourist groups and individuals, businesspeople, and attendees at trade fairs in Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong, Shenzhen and Hong Kong. The Canton Fair in Guangdong is a case in point where special kosher services are now quite profitable especially in the provision of frozen food packets. The trend will continue to grow.

Synagogues and restaurants double up as community eating-halls for Sabbath and for Jewish festivals. They bring together Jews in the same area where they stay in hotels, or rent/buy housing, and generally congregate, shop and spend their time while in the city.

It is not uncommon to see ultra-orthodox businessmen at a stopover for Sabbath prayers and meals at the Chabad Houses or Sephardi synagogues which have been established in major Chinese cities of Beijing, Shanghai or Guangzhou to accommodate the growing Jewish presence there. These businesspeople are doing their rounds in Asia, buying, for example, commodities from plants they have found and for which they have secured kosher certification, to export the products to places like Belgium, New York or Israel. It is also increasingly common for the Chabad rabbis of the various communities around Southeast Asia to supervise and certify food production plants for the benefit of their own local needs, which are later turned to export. Several production plants have since grown and necessitated large numbers of kosher supervisors and Jewish workers in attendance, which has led to the growth of the (orthodox) Jewish communities in these places and significant growth in profit for the administration. Bangkok's Jewish community has enjoyed robust growth as a result of this practice.

The Olympic Games was an important benchmark in this process. With the mandate of the requirements of the International Olympic Committee that kosher and *halal* products be available at the Olympic Athletes Village, Chinese authorities had little choice but to accommodate the requests of the Jewish community and also become familiar with the details of kosher food requirements. With hundreds of thousands of people in attendance, and millions of readers and viewers, China's kosher industry and Chabad's credentials were exposed and gained credibility.

Organized Jewish tours to China require kosher catering. In many cases the local community is asked to prepare packed lunches and dinners; the kosher restaurants are patronised; vegetarian and Buddhist restaurants also benefit.

A number of hotels in major cities are already aware of Jewish dietary habits, and a rabbi or kosher supervisor may come a day earlier to kosher the kitchen, boil the cooking pots and pans, and oversee the preparation of food for the group. In this way a number of hotel chefs and managers are becoming accustomed to Jewish habits.

As non-Jewish tourists come to China, many may also prefer to eat kosher products; those concerned with the hygiene of the food prepared, those who do not eat pork, or are seeking vegetarian and/or Western food options would be potential consumers of kosher food.

### **Chabad and the kosher industry**

The biggest winner in the growth of the kosher industry in China has undoubtedly been the Chabad community.<sup>5</sup> Over the last decade Chabad missions have dominated the Jewish community scene in major cities, far-flung districts and developing regions where Jews live in Southeast Asia, working hard, nurturing even the smallest groups with Jewish services, providing hospitality to travelers, wayfarers, businesspeople and local residents, ultimately growing in size and economic viability. Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan are exceptions, owing to a centuries-old community life in the first two involving many denominations and Jewish and Israeli groups, and the US Army chaplain in the latter.

Since the late 1990s, Chabad has patiently built up its community structures, cooperating with local Jewish residents and the business community. Owing to a lack of Jewish patrons in China, a lot of its activities were funded by industries and a lot of its revenues come from the kosher industry. For example, it supervises El Al menus and kosher restaurants, and profits increasingly from contracts to supervise raw materials and other products on behalf of the large kosher licensing agencies. Chabad's employees work as emissaries, on the one hand, and as supervisors, on the other; hence the kosher industry is directly funding Chabad activities.

Being at the forefront of the organized Jewish presence in these places naturally places Chabad emissaries in a strategic position vis-à-vis local food businesses, government officials and Israeli, Jewish and ultra-orthodox interests. Many have gained invaluable knowledge, contacts and expertise.

Chabad emissaries have often been bitterly criticized by ultra-orthodox and modern orthodox communities in established Jewish districts around the world because of some of their ideological-theological positions, but mainly because they encroached on the "turf" of other Jewish communities, competing for patronage and charity dollars, students and disciples from roaming congregants. Their work in far-flung regions in Southeast Asia, on the other hand, filled a niche ignored by other Jewish organizations. As international food production industries moved to Southeast Asia, Chabad found itself wielding far-reaching influence. Chabad was also able legitimately to claim these regions as their own.

Its often strained relations with ultra-orthodox communities in Israel and New York have improved significantly as a result of their hospitality and assistance to orthodox travelers and business interests in often testing circumstances.

Rabbi Shimon Freundlich of Beijing may be considered the point man on kosher issues (amongst the gamut of other important Jewish matters) in China, although Rabbi Shalom Greenberg has a separate organization in Shanghai also supervising products bringing in revenues to support staff and creating an industrial hub upon which to build the community. The Chabad rabbis of Guangzhou and Shenzhen are increasingly building their spheres of kosher influence in their regions, each bringing in significant profits. Apart from running his own certification program, being the rabbi of the Beijing Chabad community places Freundlich in a convenient and strategic position to meet and assist other supervisors entering China.

As the official supervisor of the Olympic kitchen, Rabbi Freundlich no doubt gained experience in dealing with Chinese bureaucracy and officials, and will continue to be an important intermediary between the interests of the kosher industry, the Jewish community and the Chinese authorities. The kosher restaurant Dini's in Beijing opened a second service for the Olympic Games. The publicity resulting from the oddity of kosher food served at the Olympic Village attracted media attention and public curiosity. Many of the pieces are in place to expand the horizons of the industry: the question remains in what direction. Chinese opinion-makers are further intrigued by the kosher industry's reputation.

Kosher supervisors from orthodox and ultra-orthodox communities around the world arriving in Beijing, Shanghai or Guangdong invariably require the hospitality of the Chabad community, for prayers, kosher food, and Sabbath food and services. Even if their communities are embroiled in ideological disagreements in the United States, Israel or Belgium, in China the direct human contact and friendships shared have played a large part in healing these rifts. Of all the strangest places for inter-denominational friendships to form, China may be the most significant. The opportunities for the industry outweigh the visceral benefits of sectarian conflict. The mingling of a large number of key Jewish kosher supervisory figures will invariably have implications for the wider Jewish world and afford Chabad greater influence on kosher supervising around the world in the decades to follow.

A specific downfall of Chabad's activities in China may also be attributed to the kosher industry. The emissaries, busy with supervising food and the profits associated with the industry, are not always available to undertake their primary mission to help build Jewish community functions, outreach activities and Jewish services to smaller cities where Jews may be in China and the nurturing of Jewish-Chinese relations.

Ironically, other groups are now beginning to vie for part of the kosher market in Asia, and invariably the struggle will involve ideological, theological and ethnic considerations.



### ***Shkhita* for local consumption**

Chabad has carried out most of the *shkhita* of kosher poultry, beef and mutton for local Jewish consumption. A ritual slaughterer, usually a devotee of the Chabad movement, would arrive every few months, and increasingly regularly, to slaughter several thousand chickens, several tens of heifers and lambs. These would be used for the city's Jewish communities and restaurants, sold to families and sent to other communities which were too small to organize their own slaughtering.

With evidence that the Jewish communities are growing, and more diverse Jewish services are necessary, other Jewish groups have begun opening up community centers and synagogues in Chinese cities, supported by wealthy Jewish patrons. The New York Syrian Jewish community has sponsored a venue in Shanghai and Beijing, and a Moroccan Jewish family sponsored a rabbi and services in Guangzhou. Not wishing to avail themselves of Chabad's *shkhita* and supervision, possessing the skills to slaughter and prepare the meat themselves, and preferring more rigorous or different *halakhic* specifications, they have begun their own kosher meat preparation strictly for local consumption. Distributed to the Sephardi network of communities around China, and sold for lower prices to families, tourist groups and restaurants, it is challenging Chabad's role and hegemony as the single provider of kosher meat supplies and the single axis of Jewish life in China.

The role that kosher meat plays in the life of Jews is the economic impetus driving these challenges. Ironically, where Chabad used to encroach on other communities' territory, in Asia others seem to be encroaching on its own congregants to develop critical mass. Some threats have already been relayed between the respective groups, including underhand attempts to stifle the competition by reporting them to government officials and rumor-mongering. Kosher wars and tensions emerging from undercutting prices are likely to challenge the status quo.

While the kosher certifying organizations coming from abroad have little vested interest in the affairs of the local kosher meat market or their disputes, trying to get on with each other and not stir up controversy, local community politics on the other hand has only just begun, which may bring disrepute to all. As the community matures and develops diversity and alternative organizations, greater strategic planning may become necessary to take full advantage of the potential for the Jewish food and kosher industry and the only way to avert crisis.

### **Supervision of raw materials for international food conglomerates**

At present, the international kosher supervisory organizations are more inclined to give certification to products that even without the certification would likely be kosher; so that, if there are some mistakes in procedures or

the factory gets raw materials from a different supplier than is known to the supervisor, the harm is minimal as they do not contain any intrinsically not-kosher materials. Hence materials produced include such basic raw materials as food additives, pharmaceuticals and folic acid, paracetamol, vitamin K1, food colorings including artificial synthetic colors, food dyes, pigments, preservatives, sweetener including natural and artificial, amino acids, spices, seasoning, oils, cellulose, vitamins, supplements and nutritional, and industrial chemicals.

Although more complex and requiring spot checks, also certified are corn, soya and peanut oils and their derivatives, corn starch, corn syrups, maltose and sorbitol, but no meat oils or fats. There is a growing supervision of dehydrated vegetables, onion, garlic, peppers, carrots, tomatoes, dried peaches and apple rings. All these can be supervised by spot checks to ensure that the normal processes continue and there are no added ingredients. Special productions include tinned mushrooms, asparagus and mandarins. For these the plant must be koshered and requires a period of full-time supervision throughout the production. Slowly more complex productions are being undertaken, such as candies and specialty candies.

### **Kosher certifying agencies**

As there is no one centralized or accepted authority amongst world Jewry, the kosher food supervisory industry is also not homogenous or centrally controlled in any way. Quite the opposite: splintered and politicized into ideological, religious, community- and ethnic-based Jewish groups, the kosher certification industry is an instrument of individual group influence over their constituency by affecting and guiding what food they may or may not eat. This industry represents one of the most cynical aspects of contemporary Jewish life, community and religious politics. Its entry into China is curious because a disproportionate amount of Jewish communal politics has the potential to move with it to China before a sizable Jewish community even exists.

Supervising bodies active in China include the Orthodox Union, OK, Star-K, K of K, KSA, LBD and Chabad Beijing; and increasingly Israeli kosher supervision organizations are entering the Chinese market. Many of these have offices in Beijing and websites and are open to any factories that make enquiries of them. *Kashrus Kurrents* journal of spring 2006 reports that nearly half of the new kosher certifications issued to industrial plants by the Baltimore-based Star-K are in China. Rabbi Amos Benjamin of Star-K claims to have been certifying products in China as kosher since 1987. Rabbi Grunberg of the New York-based Orthodox Union says that OU is certifying over 300 plants in China.<sup>6</sup> Rabbi David Markowitz opened Shatz Kosher Supervising Services in China five years ago and recently in Vietnam. The rabbi lives in Israel but spends about two weeks each month working in China. Aside from the office near Hong Kong, Markowitz has one in China's

Shandong Province, a region on China's east coast, where many fruits and vegetables are grown and processed.

The certifying agencies often compete with each other; and, though the prospects of real tensions may be dismissed, there exist recriminations about their respective reliability. But it seems that they are on their best behavior in China, fearing that too much undercutting would put them on the wrong side of China's bureaucracy and their visas would be revoked, preventing them from entering China and carrying out their work.

Some of the certifying agencies are undercutting prices and trying to win contracts away from other agencies. Even though there are conscious attempts to try to cooperate with one another, there is some residual competitiveness in their activities. As the market is large enough to share, and perhaps so large that sharing may be the only logical way to succeed, there may be no alternative to cooperation. Chinese factories increasingly understand that kosher certification is a marketing tool to increase their market share in the United States. All agree that under these conditions the market will grow significantly.

There is nothing to stop any one of these organizations from supervising more complex foods, from developing lines for cooked foods and even the ritual slaughter of kosher meat; the only consideration is the trust that their constituencies place in them and the ruin of the organization if the trust is breached.

### **Kosher China and its implications for Jewish law and ethics**

There are other far-reaching considerations that may be worth considering when certifying products and raw materials. The question of ethics is one that is both potentially controversial and of great moral importance, with the potential to place the kosher industry as a champion of ethical food standards and to cement its image in ways that it did not expect.

These are complex subjects that need investigation and collaboration with other networks and organizations. The main areas of concern are the working conditions of Chinese employees: few days per month of rest; low income; difficult working conditions. These may not be of direct *halakhic* consideration but do play a background role in some ways and are interesting to speculate on.

One of the more philosophical and far-reaching issues relating to kosher food is the question whether, if food was prepared on the Sabbath and/or on religious holidays, would Jews be forbidden to eat it? Is it certifiable as a kosher product? Much *halakhic* debate focuses on this issue. The religious ideals embodied in Sabbath observance include the principle of human dignity "made in the image of God"; as God rested from labor on the seventh day, so must mankind. Every person has the right to rest one in seven days. The main *halakhic* question involved is whether a Gentile is permitted to work on the Sabbath and/or whether a Gentile is entitled to a day of rest, too. Or

does this law relate only to Jews? The *halakha* is not entirely clear about this subject, focusing mainly on the obligations of Jews not on those of Gentiles, although biblical law is clear that the laws of human dignity and rest from labor apply to all mankind.

In Israel a restaurant which operates on the Sabbath is not given a kosher certificate, dramatically affecting its clientele. A factory is not permitted to function on the Sabbath. These are highly contentious subjects in Israel and cause religious-secular strains. Though the secular are in favor of laws preserving human dignity, they do not believe this should be a religious issue and perceive the Sabbath laws to be an unconstitutional act of religious coercion and undue involvement of religion in the affairs of State.

As has been mentioned in the Introduction, some Jewish industrialists in China are trying to institute a one-day-per-week rest day, which may have far-reaching symbolism relating to labor norms. At present factory workers usually get one or two days off per month as well as holidays on traditional Chinese festivals throughout the year. It would be a curious dilemma were the kosher industry and certification process to make their certification contingent on whether the food is prepared on the Sabbath and whether the workers were treated ethically, including the right to a day of rest, to satisfactory working conditions, and to the absence of abuse and slave labor.

Perhaps in time the rabbinic authorities may adopt ethical standards and incorporate them as criteria of kosher certification. This would place the kosher standard as a champion of social and human rights in China and other regions of Southeast Asia, and lend it distinctively political and far-reaching economic dimensions.

Another curious *halakhic* debate revolves around the question of whether food cooked by pagans (idol-worshippers) may be eaten by Jews (and thereby can be kosher certified). The main issues revolve around concern that, by buying their food, Jews give economic support to their practices. Another question hotly debated is what constitutes an idol-worshipper. Is it someone who denies the existence of God or someone who holds alternative religious opinions? Are Gentiles placed in this category? Many *halakhic* opinions include all Gentiles in this category, and therefore no food (the *Mishna* specifically refers to wine, olive oil and bread) prepared by non-Jews may be eaten. Other legal opinions consider Muslims and Christians to be monotheists. In the age of modernization with the introduction of machinery into the food production process and/or involved limited human intervention, many of these issues became less relevant. The theoretical question of what would be the status of Chinese workers, being Buddhist, pagan or atheist, in the eyes of rabbinic authorities remains.

Would an atheist worker be preferable to a pious Buddhist (believed to be a kind of pagan)? Would the rabbinic authorities condone economic support of a regime with a checkered history of human rights violations and an absence of standards that Judaism considers fundamental? Another consideration when supervising food prepared by Gentiles is whether they

hate Jews or not. There is a *halakhic* concern that Jew-haters may try to contaminate the food; and, if they have motives to do so, supervision must be more over-bearing. The *halakhic* status of Chinese in these respects has not been thoroughly explored. In doing so, the future of the kosher industry in China, and what level of prominence and significance the kosher certification can achieve, will become more clear.

At present the working premise of kosher supervisors is that the food preparation is either automated and/or in cans, and therefore not exposed to possible defilement. Other issues of ethics and human rights are not considered or are swept under the legal carpet by loopholes. Many *halakhic* issues have gone unanswered or have not been adjusted to the present reality and would need revision by *halakhic* authorities most likely only called for in times of crisis, which most pray will be slow in coming.

### **International markets for kosher food from China**

Most importantly, and relevant to the growth of the kosher industry in China, is the demand of large international firms, mainly American, European and Israeli food manufacturers with diverse international distribution networks, who necessitate standardized criteria for selecting and approving the raw materials they use and the sources from which they purchase these materials. Some of these standards include health considerations, absence of mono-sodium glutamate, vegetarianism, peanut extracts, religious standards such as kosher and most recently *halal* (Muslim food standards have recently become more popular and, inspired by the Jewish model, have built an impressive list of supervised factory clients).

When the production of raw materials for these international food producers began in China, kosher supervisors were sent on behalf of the international corporations to approve the inclusion of the ingredients into the food production. Another reason is that international companies do not want to keep two inventories, one for kosher raw materials and ingredients and another for the non-kosher items. This combined with the trend for centralized purchasing presented the kosher industry with two choices: either expand to cover the full gamut of non-animal raw materials and become a part of the production chain of large industries or recede into obscurity and irrelevance.

Hence today the main market for kosher certification in China is in the making of raw materials. According to *kashrut* officials, today more than two-thirds of all ingredients reaching US food manufacturers, or US\$350 billion, is kosher certified.<sup>7</sup> According to Bloomberg News, half of China's \$2.5 billion in exports of food ingredients to the United States are kosher, up 150 percent from two years ago. America's largest kosher-certification company, the Orthodox Union, has more than doubled the number of certifications it does in China in the past two years alone.

As the Chinese food production and raw material industry matured, and aimed to become a major supplier of materials for the international food

industry, it became more serious about meeting Western health-and-safety and ethical standards. Chinese factory-owners realized they could market their raw materials to other international manufacturers if they systematically met all the criteria listed. As kosher certification of raw materials has become a standard criterion for most international food producers, Chinese factories increasingly started independently seeking kosher supervisors and hiring them directly to certify their materials for export. A big Chinese food manufacturer would need to have a kosher certification to do business abroad. Relative to their sales potential, this cost was worthwhile. This trend is increasing monthly. Instead of avoiding, or grinning and bearing, the rabbinic demands on how the food had to be produced, they embraced the method and turned the kosher supervisor into a partner and a bridge to the kosher authorities requesting they systemize and certify even more products.

Even though a large majority of the end users of most of the foods produced are not Jewish and care very little whether the food as a whole or in part is kosher or not, none the less the standards must be met for purchasing rules to permit Chinese supplies. As food production becomes increasingly specialized, and moves increasingly to China, more and more supervisors must be hired to ensure the safe production of individual ingredients.

As the kosher symbol assumed a role in the food production chain, it also became in greater demand as it appeared there was indeed an imperative for an internationally recognized standard which could be used to grade and assess the Chinese food production procedure. The kosher symbol may yet see more credence attributed to its work from a wider community, and its role could also take on political dimensions in its role in legitimizing the Chinese industries.

## **Israeli industry**

There is also an increasing attempt by Israeli manufacturers to sell their products to the Chinese market. Some are considering making the products in China for both export and for the local market. Manufacturers including Strauss, Israel's leading ice cream and dairy manufacturer, are opening factories in China. With other Israeli products such as the *Achla* brand of *hummous* and *tchina*, there is a long list of food producers exploring ways into the Chinese market.

Increasingly Israeli supermarket chains are scouting for suitable products to include in their inventories; if they especially like something, they approach the factory or supermarket chain that produces it to negotiate the purchase. It would invariably come with a precondition that it is certified by a suitable Israeli kosher supervising organization. The certification agencies benefit without having to market themselves; they are called on by both buyer and seller. There may eventually develop a conflict of interest as Israeli supermarkets can choose which certification they wish and thus can have leverage over some to comply with their own conditions, thereby reducing their independence.

## **Costs of supervision**

At present there are an estimated thousand factories that have kosher supervision, and every month tens more join the list. An average factory pays the certifying body approximately US\$4000 per annum for the certification, which does not include travel costs, driver, hotels and translator. Larger factories or more complex processes involve higher fees. The industry therefore is worth at present a relatively modest \$4 million in fees per annum. In exchange, Chinese food manufacturers have access to the US kosher food market worth over \$11 billion.

## **The kosher supervisor: scope of supervision and duties<sup>8</sup>**

A kosher supervisor is often a pious representative (or rabbi) of a Jewish religious establishment, sent by a leading and trusted rabbi or religious organization to a factory or restaurant or production line to inspect the food-making process, ingredients and utensils, and to ascertain if the food is or can be kosher and/or to advise on how the food can be prepared in a kosher way. The continued or periodic supervision of this process and the payment of a suitable fee buys the production group a certification of *kashrut* which is trusted by several or many Jewish communities throughout the world. Many people in religious communities around the world depend for their livelihood on wages they receive as kosher supervisors. Several rabbis have established their own supervising businesses. Large agencies employ hundreds of people, and thousands profit indirectly.

Presently about thirty to forty kosher supervisors come to China six or seven times a year for a period of two weeks to supervise one or several plants. Plants commonly need inspections four times a year, but this depends on the level of automation and the opportunity for change, or on circumstantial considerations.

The supervisor will first assess the suitability of a factory to be certified – its preparedness to meet kosher standards. This necessitates getting a general impression of the plant, understanding the method of accountability by viewing the order forms and purchase slips to identify which materials are used and how they can be checked. It is necessary for the supervisor to know who the suppliers are and, if necessary, to check them too. Chingching Ni of the *Los Angeles Times* describes Rabbi Grunberg's work as a supervisor for the Orthodox Union Grunberg once traveled to far western China to watch Tibetan herders using a primitive method to turn yak milk into casein, a dairy protein used as a food additive. "It was like a million Tibetans all privately cooking this on their stoves – every home is a little factory," Grunberg said. "It would be an impossible type of supervision." After the Chinese government stepped in to form a company that supplied the Tibetans with cows and a place to milk them by machine, Grunberg went back and certified the liquid milk that was to be used for the casein.<sup>9</sup> This is an example of the



automation, regulation and standards that have become necessary for kosher certification.

In the event that the factories are approved, they are prepared, machinery washed, the ingredients checked and approved. On the four or so spot checks the supervisors carry out during the year, they may check long lists of raw materials and look round every warehouse and factory floor, pick up bottles or containers to see if they are being used for production and what was in them beforehand, verify the source of sweetener and food coloring, enquire about any changes in the suppliers, and so on. Attention is paid to components of a product. Rather than conducting scientific health tests, kosher supervisors check a factory's compliance with rules about its ingredients and preparation. They look for evidence of unaccounted-for ingredients including receipts and discarded boxes. As this is an unorthodox, indirect way of inspecting, the floor managers do not know what to hide, and so they cooperate.

The main provinces to which kosher supervisors travel include Shandong, Anhui, Hubei for natural products, grains, fruits, vegetables; Shanghai, Jiangsu, Hangzhou, Guangzhou, Guangxi, Kunming and Inner Mongolia for artificial products and chemicals. As the supervisors become acquainted with the possibilities and the factories, huge growth for other kosher foods, snacks, drinks and even meat items can be expected.

### **The Jewish–Chinese encounter**

The caricaturized image of an ultra-orthodox, bearded and gowned kosher supervisor meeting a Chinese factory-owner is almost comical. Two representatives of heroic, mythologized and stereotyped nationalities meet each other and battle it out in the surreal world of religion and atheism, obsession for authenticity and purity of Jewish law, with innovative imitation characterizing Chinese industry. The themes include the Chinese liberal license to copy products and the Chinese creative flair for using unspecified ingredients, against the pedantic kosher food supervisor obsessed with ritual detail concerning doctrinal impurities, and obscure legalities regarding the separation of food substances. Distrust of and curiosity about each other and the shared hope of cutting a deal to everyone's economic benefit also feature in the parody. The ironic thing about kosher standards is that they are not an entity that one can copy, so it must profoundly confuse the Chinese, who do not understand what the supervisor really wants and do not appreciate that he embodies the trust granted him to ensure that the food and its source are as they have been claimed to be. In one corner of the ring is the bizarre Kosher criteria that are often based on complex legal technicalities known only to those versed in Talmudic logic and the commentaries, and in the other is the Chinese penchant for copying anything – pitted against these different perceptions, an interesting result is sure to emerge.

The meeting of ultra-orthodox Jews and ambitious all-can-do factory-owners in far-flung rural provinces in twenty-first-century China is a suitably

Monty Pythonesque arena for Jewish–Chinese relations to take place. The ultra-orthodox kosher supervisor, with beard and hat, traveling great distances in far-flung provinces where people have rarely if ever seen a white person, never mind a pious Jew, visiting factories and cooperating with workers in preparing equipment and overseeing the production process, must be a strange and memorable experience for all parties involved.

While bearing the potential for cultural exchange, this does not occur in the classic sense, as the supervisor keeps strictly to himself outside professional duties. The sight of Jews praying, using phylacteries, wearing ritual fringes, eating their own carefully wrapped and prepared food, and their general behavior must be a curiosity. Perhaps dialogue and discussion would result but this does not occur readily. The long-term implications of these meetings are not yet known.

Judaism is non-evangelical. Kosher supervisors, who often represent the most orthodox currents in Judaism, have no motive and very little interest in explaining Jewish principles to the Chinese or to any non-Jew. When asked by Chinese about Jewish-related issues or the purpose of *kashrut*, the supervisors are faced with several considerations.

The difficulty of explaining Jewish laws to people who pride themselves on eating and consuming almost anything is challenging. The relationship between kosher food and faith in the laws of God may raise Chinese eyebrows. A distinct lack of motivation exists amongst orthodox Jews to explain or justify Jewish ideas, and theology stunts the potential for cultural exchange. The awareness that the Chinese authorities do not want Jews to discuss their religion with Chinese businesspeople makes these discussions all the more difficult, even for the most gregarious orthodox Jew.

There is an ironic pity in this lack of communication. The kosher supervisor is generally a knowledgeable and pious person who has the capacity to articulate many aspects of Jewish life and in another environment would be a treasure chest of information, stories and insight into Jewish life. His ability to contribute to meaningful Jewish–Chinese relations is significant. The professional, reclusive style characteristic of the kosher supervisors suits the Communist Party and government policies, which oppose missionary activities, but it seems a pity that a genuine intellectual and cultural exchange would usually not spring from these encounters.

Often the factory boss may wish to take the supervisor out for dinner and drinks, and in this way develop a friendship and exchange, but he is invariably refused. The orthodox Jew is very strict about what and where he eats. The supervisor comes with suitcases full of food for personal consumption – dry goods, canned meats, vacuum-sealed packets. Supervisors never have to enter a restaurant (it is questionable whether Jewish law allows them to step into a restaurant as it may lead others to think it may be kosher). They do not associate with the workers, do not eat or drink with them, and have no cause to associate with them in anything but business and professional activities. This is something which is not understood in Chinese culture and

is perhaps considered rude in a culture where eating and drinking together is an ultimate expression of friendship. The Chinese like to do business over a meal, win friends over drinks – something that is unlikely to happen with an ultra-orthodox Jew. Over time, factory owners or chiefs have desisted from offering to entertain them; they do not ask why this or that is required; they simply carry out what is expected.

From reports of kosher supervisors interviewed for this chapter, the meetings with the Chinese are very serious, great attention is paid to detail, and mutual respect offered by each to the other. The humor lies in the question of who is bluffing whom. Two archetypical antithetical icons meet each other and, instead of a battle of the worlds and a fusion of civilizations, they show high esteem, respect and utmost deference for one another.

From reports of these experiences and their interactions with factory bosses, kosher supervisors claim that the factory chiefs treat them with the utmost professionalism; they know that they are rabbis and associate this with the status of a professor or an engineer with expertise in a specific field. They do not consider the kosher process to be religious but a purely technical one relating to standards. They have the perception that the Jews are very good at business, and therefore kosher food must be good or important. Were they to discover that the rabbis have no formal education in food engineering, they would probably be very surprised as they are generally very impressed by the rabbis' knowledge of the food and its preparation down to great technical details.

Supervisors have in turn reported that the Chinese are hard-working and professional, that they are becoming a lot more professional as time goes by and that they are essentially trustworthy more than others give them credit for. They do not ask questions as to why a process should be done, which is appropriate as the technical reasons for kosher standards are often obscure, complex and uncomfortable to explain.

European anti-Semitism is often attributed to the medieval profession of Jews as tax collectors for the local landowners. In much the same way the question can be asked whether the present prominence of orthodox Jews as kosher supervisors in factories throughout China will awaken a consciousness of anger towards Jews or whether respect will be the consequence. This is an important consideration when pondering the Jewish–Chinese relationship of the present and the future.

Jews are a traveling people; records of Jewish travelers and adventurers go back millennia. No doubt in time the stories and accounts of some of the encounters experienced by kosher supervisors during their visits deep into Chinese provinces will make it back to the hasidic courts and religious seminaries of Borough Park and Bnai Brak. The Jewish Chinese encounter via the kosher industry is an extreme one, where the iconic players in the theater of religious and national identity meet each other in the light of day and grapple to understand and cooperate with one another. How this encounter will unfold, the relationship between supervisor and factory worker, factory boss, hotel staff, translator and so on, and the nurturing of

sensitivities for the Chinese reality within the Jewish religious consciousness and vice versa, is yet to be seen.

### **Chinese impressions of kosher**

The English–Hebrew–Chinese dictionary simply defines *kosher* as “Jewish food”. This is an over-simplistic and ambiguous definition. As described in Chapter 2, Jewish food can resemble any other national food, with some restrictions on the type of animals used and the separation of meat and milk. Chinese food can also be kosher.

Defining kosher food for the Chinese may be the greatest challenge of all. As discussed in Chapter 2, Chinese relate to food in a conceptually different way from Jews and even from the West.<sup>10</sup> Chinese can eat nearly anything, and are highly creative and imaginative in the kitchen. They have no doctrinal issues relating to food. Food represents their liberty and freedom and mastery over their lives. For the Jews, food as illustrated in kosher rules represents the opposite.

Chinese do not understand why meat and milk cannot be eaten together. They are astounded that blood cannot be eaten. They love shellfish and crustaceans, and are amazed that Jews do not eat these delicacies and believe the Jews are too strict. They are familiar with the issue of pork as a large number of Muslims live in China. However, they do not hesitate to mix small amounts of meat into a meal; if it is chopped up and not the major part of the dish, they contend that it can hardly be called a meat or pork dish. When they finally come to understand that meat is not to be used, they may not further understand that meat products also cannot be used, i.e. meat oil or fat or any derivatives.

Rabbi Freundlich is recorded in another article as describing some of the absurd misunderstandings of kosher food in China. When people began to hear of a Jewish standard for food which can help international sales, they started calling the rabbi and asking him to come to their factories. The problem was that many inquiries were not food-related. Some wanted him to certify toys or plastic fruit or dining-room tables. Perhaps one day a Jewish standard will be created to do this, but at present kosher certification does not. The rabbi is quoted as describing how “Somebody once called me and asked me to come bless the fish” so he could export it to the United States, but what this meant in kosher terms was to check every piece of fish to ensure it had fins and scales and was therefore kosher. It is not a matter of ‘a blessing’.

### **Kosher profit**

Interpreted in the Jewish world as an interest in Judaism, the Chinese entrepreneurial interpretation of kosher food is a bit different, encapsulated in an article written in early 2008 on the subject:

“In China, we have very little contact with the Jewish people,” said Lucy Qian, the general manager at Ningbo Good Days Food, a factory that makes mostly novelty candies in one of China’s manufacturing hubs. “We are doing this purely because of market demand.” Since the factory went kosher a few years ago, sales have soared 40%, she said. Her primary customers are Israelis and Americans who want such things as kosher lipstick-shaped Barbie candy, some of which ends up on the shelves of places like Wal-Mart. The tainted-food scandals, she said, had no impact on her business last year. In fact, sales grew. “I’m sure the kosher certification helped,” Qian said.<sup>11</sup>

The motivations for the kosher industry, as with most things in China, are economic – but this is not to say that the ramifications may not eventually extend beyond the economic considerations.

### **The health and public safety component of kosher food**

Another name for kosher in Chinese is *jie shi*, or “clean food”. This name leads one to consider the horizons that the kosher industry could reach with the right marketing and vision.

The health component of the kosher standard is of great significance in China. There is a public perception amongst non-Jews in the United States that kosher food is superior. This may have some Christian influence, but other reasons include the perception that it is more strictly inspected for cleanliness and quality, and may suggest an absence of animal products in regular packaged goods. Supermarket executives have reported that they sell a lot of their kosher products to non-Jews. Vegetarians may also use the kosher symbol to indicate that it is without meat. People with allergies are also interested in it to indicate stricter compliance regarding stated ingredients.<sup>12</sup>

The kosher certification is proving in the United States that it can provide a symbol and standard beyond the immediate concerns of the kosher observing public as a food-quality, health-and-safety standard. *Kashrut* is an age-old symbol of food purity and suitability, and has been rigorously implemented in every environment in which Jews have found themselves over millennia; it is believed to be holy and of the most vital importance to the community, so is less likely to be compromised or corrupted, and bribery for certification is less likely than in other environments. This is at least the image it lends. Its potential therefore is great.

This standard could work in a number of ways in China. As mentioned by Chingching Ni’s *Los Angeles Times* article, the kosher symbol already serves as an ally to the “Made in China” product and to Chinese food manufacturing in general, helping it build a reputation for sanitary rigor and exacting health standards, strict production procedures, organized documentation, checks and balances. The potential for a food scandal could ruin Chinese production industries overnight. The kosher standard could offset this

with a reputable international body known for uncompromising standards to supervise and certify it. It was reported that during the various food scares in China a kosher-certified factory saw sales rise, perhaps suggesting a vote of trust in its symbol. The Chinese authorities are increasingly inclined to leave all supervision to international bodies, so they cannot be blamed for mistakes made and are not a factor in bribery or other potential problems. The kosher factor thereby fulfills an important role.

Kosher certification also necessitates more accountability on the part of the factory, as it has to provide paperwork and receipts, and show evidence tracing the source of every ingredient. If this information is not provided, a certification cannot be issued. This level of checking is improving the general administrative standards of Chinese companies and is valuable for other purposes, for example tax compliance.

Another long-term possibility for the kosher symbol in China is to market it to the Chinese population. Increasingly, Chinese are concerned about food standards. Riots have erupted over fears that a food has been contaminated and standards are lacking. As an average Chinese family has only one child, the sense of protection, especially from contaminated food products, is very high. Food and health inspectors may often be bribed or cajoled over food and drink to approve a factory's sanitary status. An inspector may not check or be concerned about the source of one ingredient or another. In China there have been instances where this has caused deaths and subsequent riots, and the authorities in turn meted out the death penalty to the negligent inspectors. The industry is very sensitive and in the process of developing reliable checks and balances and standards. With sufficient marketing and preparatory work, the kosher symbol could be used as a unique and workable standard within the Chinese market and recognizable to Chinese people as a symbol of food excellence and purity.

### **Implications for the international kosher industry**

As mentioned, the international kosher supervisory groups who are often in conflict with each other amongst themselves have started to mend their fences in China. The China experience has ironically been a catalyst for reconciliation within one of the most politically explosive arenas of Jewish life. There is such a high demand for rabbinic supervisors who are willing to travel to distant locations that, in some cases, organizations have begun to share kosher supervisors.

In many respects, the small synagogues in Beijing and Shanghai are a mini-gathering of exiles where supervisors from all over the Jewish world – Australia, France, Belgium, the United Kingdom, the United States and Israel – share information on the certification process and food production practices around the world and within China. Spending time in China, they have no choice but to get on; meeting each other at the same synagogue and sharing meals together, the rifts are invariably healed.

The possibilities seem endless. With their experiences and the need in China to develop an incorruptible standard, perhaps they could inspire or initiate new services to the kosher certifying process; reform the process; add new criteria which could include health and sanitary conditions; incorporate other standards which concern foreign governments or public health and safety.

Business opportunities abound for kosher supervisors; several accounts relate how on one of their trips they were presented with a business offer or discovered opportunities or reliable partners or facilitated a business deal between friends and Chinese contacts. These occurrences are likely to increase in frequency and scale as the industry grows. The kosher supervisor may even become an agent and go between for investors and businesses or assist factories in being bought out by large international conglomerates.

These supervisors have gained tremendous know-how in the development of the food production services, not being limited to one type of food line or factory or country, and their insights in other fields would be valuable. The skills and know-how of the kosher supervisors are superior to any other foreign experts presently working in the Chinese food production industry. Food engineers and technicians and health controllers in China are all Chinese. The presence of a unique class of Jewish supervisors from Western countries with detailed knowledge of the Chinese manufacturing process – the sources, the prices, the documentation, purchase forms and insight into the entire construction of the Chinese food production chain – is an advantage that may serve the industry very well in the future.

In addition, supervisors could introduce other services, or introduce other people to do this, such as consulting on health and safety issues, advising factories on niche markets and greater access to overseas markets; they could introduce new and more efficient machinery, suggest better ingredients, indicate cheaper or better sources of raw materials, recommend more effective accounting software and tracking technology; they could consult on potential mergers with overseas companies.

The emergence of a standard-of-excellence certifying agency emerging from the kosher certifying industry is also a possibility. It is even possible to conceive that, just as Chinese showed interest in gaining the Jewish certification for food, other non-edible products could be certified with a standard reflecting quality, suitability, educational value, ethical production and so on. These are possibilities that the kosher industry may incline to consider.

### **Hesitations about complex foods**

At present there is great hesitation about the capacity of Chinese factories to produce more complex food items which would be trusted by the hyper-sensitive and selective standards of the ultra-orthodox Jewish world.

When it comes to supervising raw materials, mistakes made would not have too many repercussions, but preparation of cooked foods and meat products raises profound concerns owing to the logistical difficulties.



The insecurity surrounding the Chinese food preparation methodology, language and cultural barriers, difficulties deciphering delivery notes, fears of forgeries, and computer access is prohibitive and makes for strong reservations about the supervision of complex products, emulsifiers, fats or products that can easily be mixed with unknown agents, and raises the stakes if errors are made.

In Europe, if there is a discrepancy or a problem with the preparation of complex foods, records and order forms can be checked to ascertain ingredients and suppliers. As supervisors can be found who speak and read most European languages, communication is not a concern.

Cooked and meat products are even more daunting. Kosher supervisors say that there needs to be a completely clear understanding of how to deal with the Chinese production system; until fears are overcome and a system of automation and supervision is apparent, simple, corrective and transparent, no kosher organization would risk its reputation to initiate supervision.

The present process overseeing the production of non-animal raw materials and foodstuffs for export is creating an excellent infrastructure, enhancing the skills and the familiarity of the personnel involved, and preparing the groundwork for what all concerned are likely to realize as the next step in food and meat production.

Perhaps in the future, as the language barrier is overcome, the China option may become more realistic for complex foods. As new factories are being built, they are being purpose-designed and -geared for specific products, so the production process is much more transparent, automated and checkable. The chances of mistakes are significantly reduced. In addition the investment of money and energies is high, and risking contracts by cheating is becoming increasingly remote. Kosher supervisors are increasingly expressing confidence in the Chinese food production system.

The ability of kosher certifying bodies and supervisors to allay these concerns, and to demonstrate that Chinese standards are high and the process is transparent and could be supervised without any fear of mistake, would be of great advantage to the kosher food “Made in China” brand and would significantly enhance China’s general reputation as a reliable food producer. The local Jewish community would benefit enormously, and kosher consumers would benefit from China’s flair for food production. Cooked foods, meat products and other items could be sold significantly cheaper, owing to the cheaper workforce in China.

### ***Shkhita for export***

The kosher meat prepared in China is not licensed for export, though the industry is showing signs of being ready. The prospects could open vistas and opportunities for the Jewish community in China, and the large revenues from the sale of kosher meat abroad may pacify the local players and incline them to cooperate rather than not.

The opportunities are becoming more plausible in light of problems in the American kosher meat market. The July 2008 police raid and temporary closure due to illegal workers and substandard work practices at Agriprocessors, a large kosher food plant in Postville, Iowa, owned by the Rubashkin family, raised questions as to the ethical practices and the room for reform of the kosher slaughtering industry in the United States. Many feel that the time is ripe for alternative approaches to kosher slaughtering, including enhanced ethical sensibilities; and some competing food firms are looking to take advantage of changes in the marketplace, in order to provide alternatives. The price of kosher meat, especially for large families, is daunting. While many would like to see more ethical practices employed, and may prefer to eat organically raised animals, this adds to the costs and in many cases makes them prohibitive.

The China alternative raises many interesting possibilities. The improved methods of storing, vacuum-wrapping, freezing, transportation, delivery, and improved international relations, render China a conceivable location for kosher meat preparation.

With supervisors already well trained in the Chinese food market, with businesses established in Chinese cities, serviced by translators who understand the industry, and even supervisors who speak Chinese, and/or Chinese converts to Judaism who can read and negotiate the minutiae of Chinese culture, the industry could be ready. Attractive prices, machinery which reduces the possibility of human error, and the option of sophisticated video operational surveillance could make the process superior to any meat preparation industries in the United States or elsewhere and provided far more cheaply.

### **Future of the industry**

The future of the kosher supervision and certifying industry in China looks bright, and is likely to grow many times its size and develop many sub-industries. It has the potential for marketing as a symbol of excellence even for local Chinese. It could champion other concerns, too, and elevate food production levels to new heights.

In the event of its growth and the ready availability of complete food products in China, it is conceivable that the religious community living in China would be facilitated in considerable growth. Small Jewish communities may pop up in more distant provinces working in food production and other manufacturing jobs. It is possible that the kosher industry could stimulate the growth of religious communities, more so than secular ones, as a religious Jewish presence is necessary for the industry and the availability of food is an important factor in relocating.

In the United States entire Jewish towns were established around kosher industries and meat processing plants. Similar conditions could arise in China, and Jews may benefit from suitable conditions to move there. The cost of living being lower, business opportunities of diverse sorts abounding, the

familiarity of orthodox Jews with many of the businesses that Chinese do may prove an excellent and welcoming possibility for orthodox Jews.

Many ultra-orthodox Jews are indifferent to where they live so long as they have a Jewish community, education for their children and cheap amenities. The potential to establish *yeshivot* and *kollels* (seminaries where single and married men continue their religious studies) which can be funded for a fraction of the costs of the United States and Israel may also attract community leaders to establish communities in China.

The kosher industry has potential beyond its immediate horizons. For this to actualize, significant leaps in the thinking within the certifying agencies and Jewish community organizations need to take place. This in turn requires reformulation of the priorities of kosher food and identifying the limits it can extend to catering to modern lifestyles and contemporary food preparation expectations.

A conference or exhibition on kosher supervising in China could be useful to gather the related parties together for information exchanges, to develop a consulting database on food production and comparisons, to initiate new ideas, exchange and showcase new technology and machinery, and consider the centralization of the kosher production and certifying system in China. All these ideas taking place in distant China may later be implemented back in the countries of origin.

The kosher food industry in China has the potential to change the face of Jewish life in China, which in turn could radically redraw the axis of Jewish–Chinese relations.

## Notes

- 1 See my article “Sabbatean messianism as proto-secularism: examples in modern Turkey and Zionism”, in Mehmet Tutuncu (ed.), *Turkish–Jewish Encounters* (Haarlem: SOTA, 2001).
- 2 For example, in September 2007, following negative publicity in the United States and elsewhere about the tainted food products in the Chinese food supply line, Chinese regulators began requiring companies to use numbered codes on packaging to identify the production plant of origin for products. This way, all ingredients could be traced to their source. The Orthodox Union had begun to use a similar oversight system in China as far back as 2001, demonstrating that it was keeping abreast of the latest techniques to ensure accountability of food sources.
- 3 I explore this question in more detail in a forthcoming book, Avrum Ehrlich (ed.), *Negotiating Minority Religious Identities in Asia* (Leiden/Boston, Mass.: Brill, 2009).
- 4 See Avrum Ehrlich, “Overview of the Jewish presence in contemporary China”, in Avrum Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish–Chinese Nexus: A Meeting of Civilizations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).
- 5 For detailed studies of Chabad Hasidic community life and development, see my books: *Leadership in the Habad Movement: A Critical Study of Habad Leadership, History and Succession* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2000); and *The Messiah of Brooklyn: Understanding Lubavitch Hasidism Past and Present* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV, 2004).
- 6 Ching-Ching Ni, “The challenge of keeping China kosher”, *The Los Angeles Times*, 5 February 2008.

- 7 <http://koshermaven.blogspot.com/>, “Jews & Chinese, the connections never end”, January 2008.
- 8 Partly based on conversations with kosher supervisors including: Rabbi Akiva Padua of the UK, Rabbi Martin Grunberg, Rabbi Shimon Freundlich, David Markowitz, Noson Radin.
- 9 See Ching-Ching Ni, “The challenge of keeping China kosher”.
- 10 See Chapter 2.
- 11 See Ching-Ching Ni, “The challenge of keeping China kosher”.
- 12 See <http://koshermaven.blogspot.com/> “Non Jews buy kosher: so what else is new?”, January 2008. Also <http://koshermaven.blogspot.com/>, “Jews & Chinese, The Connections Never End”. Also <http://www.jta.org/cgibin/iowa/news/article/200803100307kosherchina.html>

## **4 Jewish Studies in China: people, motivations, subjects, applications and future directions**

The study of Judaism and Jewish-related subjects is a burgeoning area of research which is now being taken seriously by the vanguard of Chinese scholars across a number of disciplines.<sup>1</sup> Over the past ten years, it has rapidly developed, making its way, in different forms, into some of the most important universities and research institutes on the Chinese mainland.

I was prompted to think more seriously about these questions in 2004 after taking up a position at Shandong University, teaching Hebrew Bible, Talmudic Thought and Jewish Mysticism. One day, while riding my bicycle through the leafy old campus of the university (which had originally been established by Christian missionaries over a hundred years earlier to advance the study of Christian theology), I bumped into a Russian-language professor, just outside the impressive German-Catholic cathedral towering over the West Gate. Some way into our discussion I asked him how many students he had in his classes, and jokingly asked why they were studying Russian and not Hebrew. In a thick Russian accent and with a stoic rationale he replied: "There is a 5000-kilometer border between China and Russia, and billions of dollars of trade, and a long history of strategic cooperation. Russian language and culture studies are an obvious and pragmatic choice for Chinese students." He had fifteen undergraduate students in his class! He asked me how many students I had in my class and why they were learning such obscure subjects as Biblical Hebrew and Talmud, and why communist/atheist Chinese were interested in exposing their best students to Kabbalah? His comment kept me thinking for some time about the reasons and motives for Jewish Studies in China and the stark differences in our students' motives for their choice of study. I had twelve students, fewer than in his class, but the Jewish people did not have a 5000-kilometer border with China, had limited historical links, and their trade portfolio was far less impressive. Why were my very bright and ambitious, mostly postgraduate students dedicating themselves to research in areas which had no apparent application to their lives, no business component and very little potential to earn them even a meager income? Why were more and more lectures being offered on these subjects throughout China? Why were institutes being established, articles being written and books being translated? These are the questions I shall attempt to answer, at least in part.

The perspectives herein are informed from working closely with Chinese colleagues and scholars, speaking to, teaching and listening to students in an endeavor to remain abreast of their general and specific interests, concerns and thoughts, while observing the possibilities for genuine sharing and exchange – on many levels – between Jewish and Chinese cultures.

### **Motives, means and themes**

The reasons and motives for Jewish Studies in China, the types of subjects being studied, the institutions involved in teaching and research, as well as the applications of these subjects within Chinese life, are the main focus of this section, together with analysis of the significance for Jewish–Chinese relations.

#### *National motives*

The Chinese have undergone centuries of bitter experiences with foreign religions, brought to their knees by concessions to Western forces and the opium trade, and foreign religious movements separately and in tandem worked to occupy the Chinese people's mind and spirit. It is curious therefore to observe how government and Communist Party officials, no doubt still scarred by historical memory, have none the less, since the beginning of the new century, made significant accommodations, have actively pursued and embraced Religious Studies, and have permitted, endorsed and encouraged the establishment by scholars of a number of Religious Studies courses and institutes, some at its best universities, commending some of the finest students of the humanities to research the ideas and texts furthest away from its own truths and realities.

What, it should be asked, could be the interest of the Chinese government, with its socialist worldview and its atheist ideology, in Western religion in general and the Jewish experience in particular?

This chapter seeks to identify (a) motives, (b) means and (c) themes animating Religious Studies in China (Judaism in particular); the types of subjects being studied; the institutions involved in teaching and research; as well as the applications of these subjects within Chinese life and identity, together with a study of its significance to East–West relations.

Much of this subject relates to the interest in Judaism, but it is by no means limited to that, rather extending to the study of general religious texts, spirituality, prayer, sociology of religion, and a series of disciplines formerly left unexplored and/or unknown by the Chinese, especially relating to the embrace of differences and the “other”, in which China is determined to develop expertise and competence. None the less, the study of Judaism in China is a deeply symbolic gesture as it represents a meeting of ancient civilizations and cultures which have remained relatively distinct until the present. Treatment of the Jews has often been a reflection of a nation's

general state of tolerance and levels of openness, and a litmus test of justness prevalent in its society. The new relationships in formation are as much a sign of the evolution of Chinese governance as is the burgeoning of the field itself.

The reasons why Chinese national policy encourages Jewish Studies are:

1. The general need of a great power such as China to understand and demonstrate its academic prowess in classical disciplines, ancient languages, cultures, religions and systems of ideas, Judaism amongst them. It is a general consensus that this is an important indicator of a nation's intellectual and scholarly abilities, which China – as an emerging great power – is keen to demonstrate.
2. Ways and means to develop meaningful and constructive cross-cultural discourse, and what China refers to as “soft power”.
3. A combination of international pressure and friendly requests of senior government and Communist Party officials to recognize Judaism as a legitimate religion and cultural discipline in China.
4. The perception in China that Jews and Judaism are important contributors to the Western system of thought, development and innovation, and the sense that China can benefit from insight into the Jewish experience. The perception amongst the general public that Jews have great business acumen brings a concordance between Judaism and the Chinese national agenda. The perception that Jews have suffered, and are therefore have a brotherhood with the Chinese, dilutes the negative connotations of studying a foreign religious culture.
5. Interest in the Jews has resulted in considerable international media attention, support and encouragement from Jewish organizations, and an interest in Western countries, and has shown China in a favorable light as a tolerant and cultured nation sensitive to the cultural dynamics of “the other” and the voice of the penultimate minority.
6. Jewish Studies is perceived by local authorities in former Jewish enclaves such as Harbin and Shanghai to be a platform on which to build stronger Chinese–Jewish international cultural and commercial relations.
7. China also values its blossoming strategic and trade relationship with Israel because of the latter's innovations in military and technological production, which China considers to be very useful.

### **Opening up and soft power**

China, in terms of its economy, its population and its military, is bordering on emergence as a great power but, in terms of its cultural influence, international leadership and initiative, is lacking great-power status and even disproportionately lagging. And it has yet to develop a proven method of sustaining its great-power status. It still has not fully tested its path of political succession, nor edicted sustainable mechanisms to prevent corruption, nor made the transition to the enlightenment of peaceful exchange of political

and philosophical differences; neither has it summoned the confidence to engage in self-criticism, nor the wherewithal for the achievement of reasonable standards of living for all its citizens, and of the development of personal rights and ethical treatment for the weaker elements within society. These are problems facing many nations, but Western democracies have developed transparent doctrines and methods to grapple with these issues, thereby facilitating – even necessitating – correction, while China is still exploring the possibilities. China's leadership expresses a desire to diversify its knowledge base, to learn from other systems, and open up towards modernity and internationalism in order to integrate them into its own unique social and political system, but it has not yet found models it considers both acceptable and suitable to emulate.

For reasons too detailed to discuss here, China has opened itself up to world culture and thought, and seems determined to embrace modernity, multiculturalism, technology, commerce and internationalism as well as expressing general interest in many diverse disciplines, as a way to improve the life of its citizens. China seems equally determined to incorporate these newly acquired tools into a uniquely Chinese system instead of completely assimilating into a Western framework. It is seeking, on the one hand, to preserve the uniqueness of its political and ideological persuasion, while modernizing and learning from Western methodology, on the other.<sup>2</sup> After decades of isolation, it now recognizes the need to adopt methods which will allow it maximum leverage and development for its population.<sup>3</sup>

The Chinese leadership is becoming increasingly interested in achieving “soft power” as a basis for its peaceful rise. At the 9 January 2006 National Conference of Science and Technology, President Hu Jintao reinforced China's “soft power” ambitions, describing them as “the attainment of cultural assets and the nurturing of conditions in which innovation is achievable”.<sup>4</sup> He noted that “China would build an ‘innovation-oriented country’ within fifteen years” and reclaim its rights to a “glorious tradition”. Notions of “soft power” and peace and harmony are recurrent threads in current and recent political debate and utterings. The eleventh five-year plan adopted in the CCCPP regards the building of an innovation-oriented country as one of the fundamental policies of the Chinese nation in the future. “Under the leadership of the Central Party Committee, with co-joined efforts of the entire Chinese people, China has the potential to emerge as a deeply innovation-oriented country.”

The State of Israel is perceived to be a source of innovation, and inevitably Jewish Studies is an attendant factor. In a meeting with Israeli president Shimon Peres at the August 2008 Olympic Games opening ceremony, President Hu Jintao expressed China's desire to expand bilateral ties in the realms of science, technology, agriculture and academia.<sup>5</sup> This sentiment underscores a policy that was constructed to extract the best assets Israel is perceived to possess and which identified academia as one of them.

Policy-makers recognize that intellectual paradigms and philosophical worldviews affect, accelerate and animate the innovative capacity of societies. China's success as a world innovator rests in its ability to identify or borrow



from others suitable intellectual technologies and to calibrate them to her own condition. Using faulty paradigms likewise can stymie growth, so it searches for models that have track records of value.

Within this context, Jewish Studies is arguably being encouraged. Perhaps the study of Jewish history and philosophy may reveal some of the conditions which fermented and accelerated creative and innovative thinking amongst Jews. It is not so much an interest in Jewish religious texts or theology, but rather an interest in the underpinnings that animate the Jewish experience and its uniquely innovative productivity, which inspires officials continually to sanction investigation. By understanding the social and political conditions in which Jews became so creative, the Chinese perhaps believe they can stimulate a similar environment and precipitate the desired secondary effects on their own populations. Perhaps unreal to our mind; but, for the masters of some of the most daring feats of social engineering ever recorded in history, no projects with profound, far-reaching value to China's glorious destiny are too dramatic or fantastic to embark on.

China's relegation of soft power status to the university and academic corps is further evinced by another skillfully designed strategy to establish Confucian Institutes in every major city around the world. The goal of the Confucian Institute project is to promulgate Chinese culture and influence; the method of doing so is via a State/university collaboration. The consigning of the study of spirituality and ethics to academia is grounded in a fused socialist–Confucian identification of the education system as the foundation of long-term stability and the way forward for meaningful integration into the State's organs. The State's decision to put Judaism into this category may indeed be flattering, but it suggests hopes for a long and enduring relationship with Jewish intellectual discourse, with implications more far-reaching than imagined.

## **Discourse within the international arena**

China is not well understood abroad, particularly amongst Western nations. While China's products have proliferated broadly, its political culture, ideology and perspectives are less well tolerated. The cultural, linguistic and academic differences between East and West are still too precarious for Chinese-related studies to be easily accessed by non-specialized Western thinkers. Chinese cultural and intellectual contributions are still far from finding compatibility, status or influence abroad. The greatest obstacle to China's "soft" influence is the lack of effective interlocutors – interpreters of Chinese social, philosophic, linguistic and literary *morés* – and the absence of an effective medium through which to render the oriental worldview a more accessible perspective within Western thought.

The Judeo-Chinese socio-intellectual exchange can work both ways, not only by introducing Jewish ideas to Chinese scholars, but also by introducing Chinese culture and ideas to Jewish scholars and from them to the general mainstream of Western academia. The historical nature of Jews, who have

throughout history served as agents of communication and pollinators of ideas and information, can extend the reach and influence of Chinese academia. By empowering a Jewish–Chinese intellectual fusion, Chinese intellectuals inform and are informed by a broad international inter-disciplinary network, and can make headway along avenues that hitherto Chinese policy-makers have tried in vain, through other, less effective means.

The Jewish tradition is especially adept at re-interpreting and re-packaging information. As is discussed below, Jews have traditionally fused local practices and ideas with their own system to create a synthesis which they wrote, taught and exported as valuable “intellectual instruments” to other parts of the world.<sup>6</sup> Many nations’ ideas were popularized as they were picked up by Jewish interpretation, and some even survived because of this where they might otherwise have not.

Even today, on a different plane, Jews seeking spiritual enlightenment have been involved in popularizing Chinese medicine, Chinese philosophy, Buddhism and Daoism.<sup>7</sup> There is a significant component of youthful spirituality and experimentalism with “the other”, with which young Jews are heavily involved. One of the concerns of rabbis around the world is the obsession that young Jews have with the East and being influenced by its religious and cultural practices. The Jewish predilection for “the other” is a natural partner for China’s predilection for the West.

It is foreseeable that, in the wake of a more mature Judeo-Chinese socio-intellectual exchange, the influences would be more symbiotic. Jewish scholars in modern China could conceivably develop a fusion of Jewish and Chinese thought and culture to use within other contexts around the world, such is the nature of the ever-evolving flow of ideas and the habit of Jews who have excelled as history’s traders in ideas.

Scholars of Judaism who teach in China will no doubt be influenced by their time spent in China, and this undoubtedly has an impact on their writings, teaching and careers upon their return to their countries of origin. China’s social and cultural landscapes are fertile ground for philosophic pondering and contemplation within Jewish paradigms in that they provide a stimulating and fascinating source of material for new ideas and re-interpretation of the old. China’s reality provides a stark contrast to the contours of Jewish thought and helps crystallize the underpinnings of the respective cultures, which are invariably relayed in Western frames of reference and through foreign mediums so that China’s reality is exported through Jewish scholars.

It is curious to observe that some of the only information coming out of China over the thirty years of its isolation from 1950 until 1980 was via China’s small Jewish community.<sup>8</sup>

Jewish Studies in China has the effect of, on the one hand, enriching Jewish scholarly studies in general and, on the other hand, popularizing Chinese-related thought amongst international intellectuals and within a broader intercultural discourse. The prospect of finding such a suitable medium to

engage inter-cultural currents is probably a primary motive in the continued acquiescence of Jewish religion and culture as a legitimate academic pursuit. The development of a homegrown Jewish Studies industry in China may indeed pave the way for a shared dialectical platform through which to convey aspects of Chinese culture, which may otherwise not be appreciable, lacking broad East–West frames of reference.

Able to find expression using Jewish-related imagery, scholars within Chinese academia begin to form an entry point into discourse on international religion and culture, which makes them a partner, not an object, of cultural discourse.

### **No concession to Western imperialism**

China is looking for models of development in Singapore, Japan and Korea, and digging within its own past for democratic and critical models, and many thinkers are asking if modernization necessarily equates to Westernization. There is much concern that many of the less savory habits and characteristics of the West are seeping into Chinese life, as if efforts to modernize and emulate the West mean conceding to a perceived superiority.

One of the fundamental aversions uniting traditional Confucian culture, Marxist and Maoist thought is the deep distaste of Western imperialism and its perceived instruments: capitalism, democracy and Christianity. The reconciliation between these sentiments and the present reality of intercourse with the West for its technological advantage hangs in a delicate balance of necessity versus traditional values. China's progressive adaptation of "Capitalism with Socialist Characteristics" was the solution to the necessity of achieving economic integrity. Democratic norms are also increasingly finding their place in administrative and political forums, although dissimilar to their expression in Western contexts. One of the last symbolic expressions of defiance and individuality China still asserts is in resisting foreign religious influence, especially Christianity, on its population and national culture. The growth of Christianity in China remains a strategic danger and threatens China's self-perceived dignity on several levels. Managing the influence of foreign Christianity is none the less done with caution so as still to ensure the continued inflow of valuable Western know-how and people.

The embrace of Jewish Studies may suggest the formation of an intellectual alliance with an entity perceived to be capable of resisting, absorbing and addressing the Christian threat.

An inter-civilizational compatibility is perceived in the shared Jewish and Chinese aversion to Christianity and foreign meddling. Both Chinese and Jews traditionally place little value in ideological expansionism or religious evangelism. They may be closest to each other in their exclusivity, insularism and national élitism, though with distinct differences.<sup>9</sup>

Not only does the study of Judaism not suggest concessions to Western imperialism, but Jews are also often credited with having introduced ideas, techniques and theories to their Western hosts. In an earlier chapter, I quote

Chinese students who generously attribute America's success to Jews, which suggests it may be more convenient or psychologically less challenging for them to embrace and recognize the Jewish genius over American technological and economic superiority.

Furthermore, by clasping Jews to its metaphorical breast, China demonstrates a tolerance and respect for minority cultures. The history of anti-Semitism has, if anything, shown the ingratitude of Western nations for the contributions of Judaism. China's interest in Judaism presents a symbol of openness and a message to Western nations that the European record on human rights does not put them in good stead to criticize China.

These gestures are accompanied by the profound hope that engagement with Jews can help Chinese scholars harness the currents of intellectual innovation, while permitting the Socialist Republic to retain a degree of doctrinal integrity by not conceding that the West is intellectually superior or recognizing Christianity as the source of innovation or the sole access point through which to entertain world religious culture. The Jewish "other" therefore became a convenient social interlocutor, discussed further in other chapters.

Chinese put great stock in *guān xi* (关系) connections and emotions and relations and shared interest as a basis for long-term mutually beneficial friendship. The energy invested in Jewish Studies, as described below, indicate that they are making substantial efforts to lay down the psychological infrastructure for a long and meaningful relationship with the Jewish people, with Jewish intellectualism and culture, and with the scientific and innovative offerings of modern Israel.

### **Jewish Studies not Jewish ethnicity**

As China manages a complex cast of minorities and religious trends in its territory, it has continually relied on philosophical and bureaucratic underpinnings refined over millennia to guide its policy equitably towards other religions and ethnicities.<sup>10</sup> Under Chairman Mao Zedong, specific traits were used to determine what constituted an ethnic group: a common language; a common area of habitation; a unique set of customs, attitudes and beliefs; traditional means of livelihood.<sup>11</sup>

This set of criteria overlooked the peculiar status of the Jewish descendants of Kaifeng, who, although assimilated, still clung to some aspects of their Jewish identity. During the 1950s, when investigation and discussion ensued on how to recognize the Jewish descendants of Kaifeng, their status as an ethnic group was rescinded, and a policy of referring to them as "Jewish descendants" and not "Jews" was the basis of policy towards Judaism. Too complex to deal with in detail, suffice to say that the policy that emerged severed the relationship with overseas Jewish culture from the sensitive question of the local Kaifeng group's Jewish claims. This separation would eventually serve as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the Chinese refused to associate the poor and undistinguished families of the Jewish descendants

of Kaifeng, a backwater Chinese city,<sup>12</sup> with the distinguished reputation of world Jewry. On the other hand, because the relationship between world Jewry and Kaifeng was not heavily co-related, the study of Judaism was not perceived to affect China's internal affairs, which lent it less of a stigma than Islam or Christianity.

Jews posed an especial challenge to twentieth-century and even twenty first-century Chinese conceptions of strangers. Jewish settlement in China during the 1910s until the 1940s was not colonial or imperialist but as refugees from war and persecution. In the few decades of life in China, Jews contributed to culture, the economy and harmonic relations with the Chinese, in Shanghai, Tianjin and Harbin. For contemporary Chinese authorities to not recognize Judaism relegated an entire group of people, some of whom played important roles in major episodes of Chinese history, to a definitional limbo. Chinese academics and policy-makers have been called on over the decades of contacts to correct this oversight. Over the past six decades, the Jewish question has continually resurfaced in one forum or another, so that, by the time diplomatic ties with Israel were being discussed, a process was put into motion to address the oversights and long-term goals of the relationship.

As discussed elsewhere in this book, visiting foreign diplomats from the United States, Europe and Australia, and representatives of Christian and Jewish organizations, were told that "accommodations" for the Jewish people and the Jewish religion in China would eventually be made. In addition, the needs of the expanding expatriate Jewish communities in major Chinese cities, who turned to their embassies and to visiting foreign dignitaries to represent their religious interests and raise these issues with senior Chinese leaders, were not ignored. Protocols of discussions attest to commitments to "seriously consider" how to advance the subject of formally legitimizing Jews and Judaism, while not offending the existing status quo on religions, ethnicities and minorities. Government concern that, by recognizing overseas Judaism, the status of the Jewish descendants of Kaifeng might be affected could have slowed the process, adding hesitancy and extended deliberations to the subject.<sup>13</sup> No one knew the form these "accommodations" would take. Jews were permitted to congregate in synagogues and festival gatherings; and, despite being in a legal limbo, kosher food and Jewish education and religious life and activities were tolerated. None the less, far-reaching recognition was not seen on the horizon.

On the communal, ethnic, political and legal fronts, very little emerged in the way of recognizing Jews and Judaism. In retrospect what seems to have happened, starting from 1985, was a gradual process set in motion which was recognizing Judaism via academia. Though Jewish Studies in Chinese universities has not been immediately interpreted by world bodies or the expatriate Jewish communities in China as a response to their issues, none the less on several levels problems were addressed within this paradigm, and the seeds for addressing other problems were planted.

China's "Jewish Policy" or the "Jewish Studies route" as it emerged in the 1990s was likely to have been conceived while taking into account the pitfalls of the ethnic route associated with the Kaifeng issue, while affirming the positive contributions of overseas Jews to China, demonstrating sensitivity to the historical sensibilities and symbolism associated with recognition and respect towards Jewish culture, the mutual respect shared between Chinese and Jews, and the non-threatening mutuality of interests gained from active intellectual discourse.

### **The problem of religion**

One of the problems facing the Chinese Communist Party in its engagement with the Western world has been its deep aversion to religion. None the less, under pressure it realized the need to ensure the freedom of individual conscience of its population and formally recognized the major religious currents amongst the population: Dao, Buddhism, Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism. This, however, opened a Pandora's Box as hundreds of the world's religions and denominations and ethnic groups sought similar recognition and spheres of influence in China. The Chinese authorities and party officials, with all their abilities, did not seek to assume competence as the arbiter of religious quarrels, or to have the final word on religious legitimacy or to navigate the minor theological minutiae that distinguish one religious denomination from the other. Nor did they like religious meddling and the imperialism that they associated with it.

The Jewish Studies route solved much of this dilemma. On the one hand, challenged from many quarters for not recognizing the existence of the mother of monotheistic religions and, on the other hand, weary of the precedent setting implications of recognizing a small and seemingly docile religion, the authorities conceived of an innovative policy which focused on the solutions and their interests, not on the problems. In so doing, a policy that embraced the Jewish genius, tried to study Jewish culture and ideas and understand the conditions that produced Jewish innovation was conceived.

By turning the engagement with Jews into an engagement with Jewish Studies, another curious transformation took place. Judaism, a self-confessed religious structure, was subjected to observation by non-religious scholars, by atheists and even by those with strong anti-religious sentiments possessing little appreciation of or sentimentality towards Jewish or biblical culture. Despite their lack of religious perspective, they succeeded in deriving relevance and applicability from texts and context. In many ways they join the movements within Judaism which gave birth to secular Jewry and the art of appreciating Jewish religion for its universal contributions, without any sense of religious obligation. In this way the Communist Party became party to secular Jewish interests and contributed to the "sanitizing" of Judaism of its orthodox dimensions and transformed it into a cultural, historical, literary, linguistic, comparative religious pursuit. Religious Jewish texts of the first order could

be studied as philosophic treatises or world religious classics. They were de-contextualized from theological imperatives. This secular study of religion appeals to many Jews of secular orientation, and some would argue is beneficial to the development of Jewish Studies and even in the interests of Jewish religion. In many respects the Communist Party aligned itself to a classic secular Jewish position, perhaps derived from the Marxist-anti-Marxist dialectic and between secular and assimilated Jews during and after the lifetime of Karl Marx.

### **A check and balance on Christianity**

The growing Christian population in China may also be of concern to the Chinese authorities, and it is likely that this trend will continue to grow. Here Judaism is instructive, too. The role that Jewish Studies can play in checking and balancing the growth of Christianity is significant and possibly valuable in the long-term development of a contingency-management strategy in the event of an increasing popularity of Christianity.

The conservative estimate of 50 million Christians in China is more likely to be over 100 million, and its growth in terms of numbers and socio-economic influence is rising rapidly. Rapid economic success against the collapse of traditional ethics and ideas has fueled a deep spiritual and ethical hunger, and the quest for a suitable religio-ideological framework to fill the vacuum.

Confucian culture has ceased to provide a meaningful spiritual reverberation since it lost the patronage of the emperor in 1905. For over a century it has been discredited and attacked by a series of cultural and political authorities from the May Fourth modernists to the socialists. Ironically, however, it has only been during the last twenty years, with the radical changes to the Chinese family structure and value systems, that the heaviest blow to traditional Confucianism was delivered. The changes to the family structure fermented by the One Child Policy will continue to have far-reaching implications. In an environment where there is no hierarchy, Confucianism is bound to unravel. The modern Chinese household has been inverted. One child, two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, who, with the development of medical technology, will all likely live into their nineties, creates an inverted family of fourteen elders to one child, where in the past there were many children orbiting around a few elders. Confucian principles structured upon a family life typically characterized by a patriarch with many children and grandchildren venerating the elder in filial piety, at the base of a Chinese ethical and moral duty system, cease to work where one child is at the center of an inverted orbit.

Buddhism is also not showing signs of acclimatizing with the challenges of China's modernity. Primarily a monistic, solitary religious practice which does not facilitate family relations, it is difficult to imagine what it can offer the Chinese citizen seeking meaning in his/her day-to-day reality.



Socialist and Marxist theories do not address the family and the spiritual needs of the individual.

So the choice of religious spiritual frameworks is limited to Islam or Christianity. Given the perception that Islam is combative and aggressive, and its patrons are countries in a state of regression and repression, it is not perceived as a favorable spiritual option for Chinese.

As Chinese Christians, who are presently strongest in rural areas, become increasingly wealthy and enter the middle-class professions and spheres of influence, Christianity will inevitably wield far greater influence. Christianity is one of the few religio-ideological structures available in China which can accommodate the primacy of the family and create an environment where the family remains important and central. Parents are inclined to encourage Christian faith if only to preserve their relations with their children, who may otherwise become lost to them. Christianity has won favor with different age groups for different reasons; for some because of its ethics, morality and conservatism; for many young people because of its associations with the West, with technology, with modernity, and with development; for others because it is perceived as wholesome and charitable, and over time has won their trust; for yet others it provides friendship and support and love in a time and place where no one else cares; it provides a business and social network which is reliable and compensates for political corruption and the absence of family networks; it is endorsed by a constellation of foreign interests, Christian missions, Western governments, and Western and Christian business interests. It is also a medium for the preservation of Chinese identity, as discussed in another chapter. The Communist Party must be concerned about this development, and contingencies are no doubt being conceived to counter it, with the Jewish Studies route perhaps fitting into this mosaic in a number of ways.

Judaism's long historical dialogue with Christianity and its ability to claim greater authenticity of biblical interpretation, as well as the ability to check misinterpretation of Scripture, is an important apparatus which no other religious group can claim. Christianity, both Catholicism and Protestantism, recognizes the authenticity of Judaism in an older-brother capacity, and finds it difficult to dismiss its arguments. Modern Christianity has reaffirmed this status and repented of its persecution of the Jews, so the position of Judaism is further strengthened. While the growth of Christianity in China does not offend Jewish sensibilities – indeed, it may even be to the advantage of Jewish people – the viewpoint of Judaism remains distinct, and it challenges Christianity on its own terms. The presence of Judaism has often provided an ethical check on abuse of power or manipulation of Scripture for doctrinal or denominational ambitions. Introduction of Jewish Studies constructs the dialectical arena for discussion and exchange with this growing undercurrent. The ability of the Chinese authorities to facilitate a dialogue with Christianity is a type of check and balance on its progress, and could in the future prove to be of significant importance.

## **The process of legitimizing Jewish Studies**

Even without access to the protocols of the deliberations of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee and the proposals of its advisory sub-committees, it is still safe to contend that, without strong government backing for the Jewish Studies route, these initiatives could hardly have begun and could hardly have been sustained in the body of a tightly controlled administration. I hypothesize that the proliferation of Jewish Studies throughout Chinese academia was sanctioned and embraced with enthusiasm at the highest levels of government and party policy. The party has demonstrated considerable skill advancing its policy, via the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, funding bodies and university administrations, into academic departments in universities throughout its vast territory and finessing the intellectual vogues and research foci of a multitude of Chinese intellectuals.

In 1985, a few years before diplomatic relations were established between Israel and China (1992), Peking University (Beida) started a program in Hebrew Studies, suggesting that the diplomatic process would shortly follow. On the instructions of policy-makers, the university authorities were called upon to open a course and prepare the first batch of students with knowledge of Hebrew language and Jewish culture so as not to leave China clueless as it established diplomatic ties. From then on a systematic increase in the funding of schools and scholars leaves little room to doubt that it is pursuant of a distinct policy.

Not knowing how to define Jews and Judaism, not wishing to enter into the ethnic issues beneath the surface, eager to understand the “wisdom of the Jews” and other motives already mentioned, a new approach of engagement was conceived, to engage Jewish wisdom through mutual scholarship. It seems that the integration process of Jews and Judaism into Chinese civilization was separated from social, demographic, political or legislative action, and relegated to the more flexible but still manageable confines of the academic system, to undergo an introductory period in a convenient and cautious environment where the parties could become familiar with the subject and learn what to expect from such an “otherly” and “mysterious” religious system. This method is quintessentially Chinese; it renders the subject into a governable condition and endows the hierarchy with superior leverage. To the Western mind, forming a generation of informed scholars as a first step towards tackling and coming to terms with such complex problems of religion and ethnicity seems sound and innovative; in many ways it is a typically Chinese response and has become the way for China to understand what is involved in accommodating foreign religions in general and achieving a better dialogue with Jews and Judaism in particular. In another chapter I describe sinicization as a rite of passage, to which foreign ideologies are required to submit as they integrate into Chinese culture and become part of “Systemic China”. The adaptation of Jewish Studies within Chinese academia looks to be undergoing this process.

Calling China's attitude to and oppression of foreign religions "intolerant" and "feudal" is tempting, but an overhasty condemnation precludes the likelihood that its perspective is founded on an elaborate worldview and stable paradigms of reference and analysis based within its own cultural contexts with the goal to be as enlightened as possible while ensuring domestic stability. Though different from the techniques which evolved within liberal democratic thought, Chinese accommodations of "the other" have often achieved superior results and have usually been less discriminatory than European societies.

European conceptions of "the other" and of Jews took centuries to evolve and did so within specific crucibles which saw countless episodes of cruelty and discrimination, imbued with their own sub-cultural and historical contexts. To assume that the lessons of centuries of European history should apply to China is at best wishful thinking. It is not outrageous to assume that a proud and culturally intact civilization-state such as China will insist on formulating and articulating its own policy towards foreigners, minorities and other religious traditions via its own perspectives and prisms. The patronizing expectation of Western countries that China comply with the nuances inherent in liberal democracies and Western moral prisms irritates Chinese sensibilities as masters of their own value system.

The most important question to be asked here is: Are the processes in motion real attempts to accommodate others, or cynical attempts to defer or ignore the problems? Is the "academic route" intended to be a medium by which Judaism and other religions are recognized, and accommodations of foreigners and foreign religion and ideas protected and guaranteed, or is it a way to study the problems, absorb the pressure, and neutralize the advantage that overseas cultures presently possess, so accommodation of them will not be necessary in the long run?

Similar questions ensue: Is this process a cynical/exploitative project aimed at extracting valuable information imbedded in the annals of distant civilizations with no intention of accommodating the inherent rights of people freely and creatively to express their spiritual, intellectual, cultural identities and preferences? Is the Jewish Studies route a way to recognize only Jewish culture, without the need to accommodate the uniqueness of Jewish ethnicity, because it challenges Chinese notions of ethnic identity? Does the Chinese accommodation of foreign culture and religion purport to be reasonable and on a par with the concessions afforded minorities, including overseas Chinese, in Western democratic nations? Will this process guarantee equitable treatment and opportunity for overseas nationals living in China? Are the policies conducive to developing mutual goodwill, or to creating a one-sided advantage?

The progress made by Jewish Studies advocates through the corridors of Chinese academia over the last fifteen years is without doubt a first stage in a well-conceived program, of which few outside the group of planners know its final destination. The Jewish Studies route as a vehicle and framework

for other ethnic and religious accommodations may prove itself to be an innovative Chinese way of addressing some of China's domestic challenges. If it succeeds, the relegation to academia of sensitive intellectual and religious ponderings may be hailed as an innovative and well-designed policy. None the less, many of the issues facing the contemporary Jewish communities in China are still not addressed in this paradigm, leaving many Jews frustrated and wondering whether more substantial "ethnic" accommodations are just a matter of time, or whether the Jewish Studies route is the extent of the Chinese engagement with Jewish outsiders and, together with the expatriate communities presently living in China, will have limited usefulness, which will expire in time.

The Jewish Studies route ensures that a sufficient number of suitably trained scholars and students are on hand to understand and advise on aspects of religious studies and the Jewish phenomenon as the needs to discuss and format policy arise. It prepares the groundwork to integrate and parley with a corpus of knowledge entirely unfamiliar to it and for Chinese to come to terms with inter-civilizational, inter-cultural and inter-religious exchange.

## **Gateways into Jewish Studies**

Whilst all this addresses the national interests of engagement in foreign cultural studies, the personal motives of students and scholars who dedicate years of their life to studying, writing, translating and understanding the corpus of Jewish works are different.

In the West, interest in Jewish-related studies grew from several foundations: interest in early Israelite archeology and desire to understand the origins of the Bible and biblical culture; Christian interest in biblical Hebrew and the Jewish roots of Jesus and the apostles; the intersection of Jewish thought with various Western philosophical traditions; and of course the presence of Jewish scholars and intellectuals in Europe which naturally fueled self reflection, investigation, synthesis and instruction in a host of Jewish-oriented disciplines.

In China, however, few of these disciplines exist. What seems to be a more common route for many Jewish–Chinese collaborations, and the way Chinese scholars happened upon areas relating to Judaism, has been by government guidance, or by way of chance, or by a combination of the two.

## **Chinese academia**

The gradual legitimization of Jewish Studies and the emergence of several scholars within the state's academic instrument – the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, which is the advocate of these studies – together with the growing presence in a range of university departments – Humanities, History, Religion, Literature, Sociology and Genocide Studies – has caused many to consider it a safe direction for academic career options.

Observing that postgraduate students are going abroad on scholarships, conferences are being convened, government and Communist Party officials are participating in welcome ceremonies, noteworthy international scholars in the field are participating in collaborations, and journals for the publication of scholarly articles in Jewish Studies are published in the Chinese language and approved by the Chinese censorship apparatus, many scholars and students can see that there is a future to their research and feel more comfortable, if not excited, about enrolling in courses or participating in conferences and undertaking research in Jewish-related fields.

The genuine desire amongst Chinese reformers to “open up”, which lent legitimacy to the study of Western philosophy and science, did not view the study of foreign religion with the same priority. Chinese understanding of Western religion is consequently acutely superficial and disjointed. Over time, however, attention to these fields is being viewed as necessary and legitimate. As this process continues, the study of Judaism as the spiritual and theological underpinning of Christianity and Islam and other monotheistic variations becomes apparent and worthy of investigation.

Owing to the status of a professor in Chinese academia, his/her influence over the subjects that a masters and doctoral student can pursue is also an important determinant. The academic leader of a unit can submit to university and other funding bodies for grants. To do so successfully, he needs to establish his credentials in the field; the postgraduate student body is enlisted to translate, research, write and generally expand the discipline, and invariably becomes more deeply committed to the research material. An array of research applications and requests for government funding by senior academics in Jewish Studies have been answered in the affirmative, and a number of initiatives have received approval, funding and legitimization to continue. In this way – by provision of academic patronage, opportunity to showcase research, and the availability of project grants – the government’s goal of legitimizing Judaism is becoming manifest.

The pressure on Chinese scholars to publish and open vistas of new research with preference for international flavors is a motive behind the growing popularity of Jewish Studies. The competitiveness to seek new fields with relevance to their disciplines, meaningful content, room for debate, challenge, speculation, international-cosmopolitan appeal, and to find applicability to Chinese life demonstrating patriotic service by sinicizing a foreign influence and extracting its functionality for the homeland are basic ingredients of a successful academic.

The traits of Jewish Studies, discussed below, lend it appeal and functionality for the ambitions of Chinese academics and suggest that its popularity is likely to grow. The referential value inherent in Jewish material had demonstrated that it can be mined and abstracted in many innovative ways. The availability of channels to publish findings in recognized national journals is another incentive in building the scholarly corpus.

## **Manifest opportunity or lack of choice**

Several young (and promising) scholars, whom I asked about their motivations for transferring their research interests to Jewish Studies, were not able to explain clearly, stating that “they couldn’t recall” or it was a “complicated matter of perspective” and “depended on the audience”. These polite but vague replies suggest that their motivations were not always altruistic or noble but born of opportunity: a doctoral position, a scholarship, or incentives to pursue an area relating to Jewish Studies. Some of these represent the first generation of highly educated, clever, articulate and open scholars, who pursue their disciplines with characteristic diligence and are committed to its pursuit, but may equally have found interest in other areas and disciplines had the same incentives become available. The problematic nature of Chinese academia, where students do not always choose their research subjects themselves, is a topic discussed in more detail below.

An interesting example of this is Professor Zhong Zhiqing, an accomplished scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who has translated important Israeli novels including those by Amos Oz and A. B. Yehoshua. She is conversant in Hebrew and will undoubtedly be recognized for her work in relaying Israeli literature to China. She describes how she entered the field:

I was chosen by my Institute of Foreign Literature at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences to study Hebrew language and literature in Israel after the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Israel in 1992. I became fascinated by Jewish achievement and the impact Jews made on historical memory.

Another scholar, Song Lihong, began his career in Greek language and history, and ended up studying the first-century Jewish-Roman historian Josephus. Song received a scholarship and spent a year at Bar Ilan University in Israel, returning to Nanjing University to teach Jewish history and civilization with Professor Xu Xin.

This is not the place for a critique of Chinese academia; suffice to remark that the choices available to students are limited, students do not usually decide the courses they study, and they very often do not decide the department into which they are admitted. Given an option to take up a position at a university department or give up their opportunity to attend university is not a luxury most Chinese relish; and, not prepared to terminate advanced education, many able students find themselves in research areas they were not or did not know they were interested in. Many of my own students did not originally choose Jewish Studies. I wonder what the state of Jewish Studies would be if the deeply impassioned students could find their way to the subjects in which they were most interested. The present unsynchronized mismatch between the working of the Chinese academic system and the preferences of students is a challenge to which China will need to attend in

order to maximize its human and academic potential. Jewish Studies none the less has done a good job in inspiring many of these “coerced” students to find a subject of interest. At some point it may be interesting to compare the satisfaction rate and rate of dropouts from Jewish Studies versus those who join and/or continue their studies in other disciplines for an indication as to whether it is inspiring students or whether it is studied out of an act of duty.

### **A gradual process of synthesis**

The more traditional Chinese intellectuals – historians, philosophers, Confucian scholars occupied with Chinese-related subjects – are relative latecomers to Jewish Studies. Their reticence towards religion in general and their caution to not appear too open to potentially controversial or non-mainstream disciplines kept them at a distance from Jewish-related issues until the beginning of the 1990s. Many are still unsure of the relationship between Judaism and philosophy, Confucianism or the study of world history. Unable to access foreign languages (English, German, Russian, Spanish, French, Arabic or Hebrew) for first-hand impressions, they are dependent on a long and tedious process of translation, synthesizing, review and critique over a decade or a generation before beginning to consider and analyze the Jewish contribution to their disciplines.

Though a host of Jewish-related disciplines have potential to interest Chinese scholars, these take time to percolate through cultural and regional differences until they are ready to be considered in serious ways within Chinese academia. This process is being accelerating as a number of centers for Jewish Studies produce translations of important texts, and more competent scholars are trained and exposed to academic forums and conferences relating to the field, and as more funds become available to finance scholarly exchanges in a broadening array of fields.

Once the stage of translation, challenges accessing sources, and legitimization of material has been overcome, either by scholars who master the primary sources or through the availability of good translations of a wide cross-section of material, the next stage would be discussion and analysis. This process requires a different breed of scholars, thinkers and intellectuals, and is conducted purely within Chinese terms. It is at this stage that many of the more interesting fusions and symbiosis can be anticipated.

### **Philosophy, history and the Western classics**

Several important academics started their career undertaking advanced post-doctoral or professorial research in other disciplines. Because Jewish Studies intersects many of the major fields in philosophy, theology, literature, sociology, history, music, politics and dozens of other disciplines, it is not uncommon for Chinese scholars to describe how they stumbled on to a



Jewish-related component or experience and found it necessary or relevant to explore further by reading more specialized subjects and then came to find it necessary or even fundamental to their continuing academic life. By making contact with Jewish scholars, attending specialist conferences, participating in international projects, and cooperating with visiting/overseas scholars and institutions, they were drawn closer, and became advocates and pioneers in unearthing the Jewish factor in their own disciplines.<sup>14</sup>

Dr Shalom Saloman Wald, in his important strategy paper *China and the Jewish People*, observes that few Chinese authors limit themselves to one period or aspect of Jewish history.<sup>15</sup> He observes that a number of Jewish history authors of the 1980s and the early 1990s have since disappeared, suggesting that either publishers or readers or the authors themselves were not interested in or capable of achieving in-depth analysis of a specific phenomenon or event or period in Jewish history, and moved on to other subjects. Wald's contention that there is a lack of depth in textual analysis is correct. As translation of primary texts continues, it will become clearer if this contributes to a more profound analysis of Jewish civilization or if superficial discussion is the extent of the interest of Chinese academia.

Several well-known scholars of Western philosophy and increasing numbers of graduate students in philosophy are finding relevance in Jewish philosophy. Some have argued that the Jewish philosophic experience stands together with Greek or German philosophic contributions as pillars of the Western intellectual tradition. Many Chinese who spent years training in Platonic or Aristotelian thought, studying Greek, German and Arabic, have turned to Philo or Maimonides or other Jewish philosophers representing Neoplatonic or Aristotelian ideas. Some are turning their attention to Jewish religious thinkers throughout the ages, and observing their role in developing, adapting and integrating the philosophical arguments of their contemporaries. Some have noticed that Jews have built their own religious constructs on existing philosophies, or have used or synthesized these philosophies in interesting or innovative ways. This is particularly evident to Chinese scholars who excel at learning the structural methodology of a philosophy and are excited to notice the philosophical structures used similarly but differently by Jewish thinkers. Some feel that Jewish philosophy is a suitable vehicle to explore the other philosophic traditions and provides a crash course in the salient features of various philosophical methodologies. Others have taken an interest in the personalities of Jewish thinkers themselves – often referred to as “the other” – within the Western system, and Chinese can empathize and identify with them more profoundly.

Professor Fu Youde began his academic writing in 1984, penning an MA thesis on Spinoza. He published articles on Spinoza's *Treatise on Politics*, and on its critiques. He became better-known for his writings on George Berkeley, John Locke and other Western philosophers. In 1992, the Spinoza Society of China invited him to translate Spinoza's *Hebrew Grammar* into Chinese. He applied for and was accepted into a graduate program at the

Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies to acquire Hebrew skills to translate this work. Whilst there he attended courses in Jewish Studies. He then moved to London to attend the reform rabbinic college the Leo Baeck Institute, where he observed first-hand the adaptive processes being produced within wings of Jewish thought. In 1994 he attended a summer school of Jewish philosophy at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and returned to Shandong University and established the Research Institute in Jewish Culture.

He describes what brought him to do so:

As I studied Judaism, I gradually realized that it was a civilization with an enduring history and profound contribution to Western and human civilization, and it should not be beyond the Chinese purview. It was a shame that Chinese people had nearly no idea of this magnificent civilization. . . . I emerged as a scholar under the “opening up” policy. I believed that the Chinese needed to know Judaism and assimilate it into China’s own new culture. In other words, I thought that Judaism was useful to the reconstruction of modern Chinese culture. I was aware of my obligation, as a scholar, who had a chance to learn Judaism abroad, to be a medium to introduce Jewish culture into China. As soon as I made up my mind, I began to implement it. This was my goal when initiating my program on my return to China in 1994.

Fu Youde did build a center to disseminate Jewish Studies. He served as president of the Shandong Philosophic Society and became the dean of the School of Philosophy at the university. Shandong University School of Philosophy is currently ranked as one of the top philosophy and Religious Studies institutions in China, and his position as an advocate of Jewish Studies was not insignificant. His contention that Jewish philosophy represented an intersection of most major currents in Western, Eastern and religious philosophies, and represented a model of reference for the development and reform of China’s own unique spirituality, was a force behind establishing what has become the most extensive and far-reaching center for the study of Jewish religion in China, as described in more detail later.

### **Love of foreign languages**

Some of the first Chinese intellectuals to “discover” Jews and Jewish-related experiences as important intellectual stimuli for Chinese life were not academics but informed Chinese readers of foreign-language fiction during the 1920s and 1930s. With access to and interest in a variety of international languages, they became exposed to Jewish authors in Russian, Polish, Spanish, Esperanto, Yiddish, English, even Arabic, and constituted one of the first waves of Chinese intellectual classes exposed first hand to Jewish experiences.

The efforts of literature-lovers have continually informed the Chinese intelligentsia, and since the 1980s Jewish writers were and are again being

translated. Their role cannot be understated in the relaying and rendering of Jewish culture and ideas into Chinese and pioneering the Jewish–Chinese nexus. As they develop emotional leanings towards the characters and the authors they translate, they become increasingly motivated to impart as accurate a depiction as possible. However, as Professor Fu Xiaowei states, their innocent mistakes about Judaism, born of the lack of material available to them, are causing their many readers in turn to misunderstand Judaism:

... my recent survey and study on contemporary Chinese scholars shows that this group of people's misunderstanding is serious and would cause greater consequence to other Chinese readers' misunderstanding of the Jews and Jewish culture. . . .<sup>16</sup>

The translation of basic terms and concepts, as well as misunderstandings of the subtle differences (from the Asian perspective) between Judaism and Christianity, may continue to misinform until a more accurate foundation of Jewish knowledge is built by Chinese academia within the Chinese language.

### **Literature penned by Jews**

As mentioned, some of the first contacts between Jews and Chinese were in the realm of literature. During the 1920s, important Chinese left-wing thinkers, including Mao Dun and Lu Xun, introduced Yiddish literature – the works of David Pinski, Isaac Leib Peretz, Sholem Aleichem and Sholem Asch – into China, believing that they would be useful as a model for a more accessible Chinese writing style. The fad attenuated as political developments between the nationalists and the communists became the primary focus of literary magazines. Sixty years later, in the 1980s, after two generations of turmoil, political affairs were relegated to a back seat by the nurturing of Chinese intellectualism. Jewish writers, or “writers of Jewish origin” as Professor Fu Xiaowei correctly refers to them, began to make their *début* in Chinese literary magazines, amongst critics and in books available to the general populace. A string of fads around Jewish writers and subjects generally referred to as “Jewish Fever” surfaced.<sup>17</sup> Over a hundred “Jewish writers”, including Franz Kafka, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, Isaac Babel, Sholem Aleichem, S Y. Agnon, Joseph Heller, Norman Mailer, J D. Salinger, Henri Bergson, Stefan Zweig, Marcel Proust and Cynthia Ozick, were popularized in China as Jewish celebrities. Many authors who were not Jewish were also added to the list as if they were.

In her work, Fu Xiaowei surveys the impact of some Jewish writers on some of China's best-known authors and social critics as well as on social movements. For example, she describes how, in the 1960s, Sholem Aleichem was portrayed as the “writer who loved his people” because he depicted Jews in a positive and romantic light, and was used as an example of how Chinese writers should portray and love their people.

She observes that the “Kafka fad”, from its beginnings in the 1930s and 1940s, and its re-emergence and re-interpretation in the oppressive years of the 1960s for the “purpose of criticizing decadent bourgeois culture”, was then used and reinterpreted by the opposing camp of reformers, reaching a high point at the beginning of the 1980s with Kafka being referred to as “the spiritual mentor of the post-Cultural Revolution” and being synonymous with Western literature. She describes how Yu Hua, considered to be a leader of the Chinese avant-garde, was deeply influenced by Kafka and used his techniques in his own work.

A prominent Chinese scholar at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Ye Tingfang, was instrumental in legitimizing and popularizing the study of Kafka. Without his support in organizing conferences and demonstrating to scholars that it was acceptable to take an interest in him, the trend may not have been so profound.

Isaac Babel also became popular with Chinese readers, albeit in a different way: he was introduced by a Chinese-American, Wang Tianbing, who enlisted the services of one of the best translators of Russian literature to translate Babel. Many Chinese readers have loyalties to translators who in many ways form public opinion and consensus in literature.

At least four Jewish authors – Kafka, Bellow, Malamud and Singer – were included in the list of necessary reading material and in textbooks for Chinese high-school students. The Jewish identity of Kafka was not overly emphasized until the 1990s when Max Brod’s biography of Kafka was translated into Chinese, and the Jewish complex of Kafka’s personality became more apparent and was discussed in articles and books in the Chinese language.

Isaac Bashevis Singer’s works also received a “blind” following in China in the years after he was awarded the 1978 Nobel Prize for literature, with articles and translations of his stories appearing in the major literary magazines. His style was adopted by Chinese writers, who noted his influence on them. Fu Xiaowei quotes Dr Lu Jiande, the assistant director of the Foreign Literature Department at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who noted that the infatuation with Jews that gained momentum in China “probably started with Singer”.

Others are also popular, including Malamud, whose comment “Every man is a Jew” was the subject of over thirty-five articles in Chinese periodicals.<sup>18</sup>

Over seventy books from more than twenty Israeli writers, poets and essayists have been translated into Chinese since the establishment of Sino-Israeli diplomatic relations in 1992. This has been accomplished through the aegis of the Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature based in Ramat Gan, Israel, and Chinese publishing houses, with the support of the Israeli embassy and Chinese academics and the enthusiasm of readers.<sup>19</sup> One noted scholar, Ruth Wisse, Professor of Yiddish Literature and Professor of Comparative Literature at Harvard University, calls this phenomenon “a work in progress”.

Chinese readers are becoming acquainted with Jewish culture and ideas by reading the works of Jewish authors. Both readers and translators develop

a passion for the sentiments expressed and move from one Jewish author to the next. Translators and critics, required to understand more about Jewish life and practice to perform their duties, refer to Jewish religion, philosophical classics and the study of Jewish history, which creates a circular momentum. Many students and scholars of Western literature unwittingly discovered Jewish authors and then moved to the study of Judaism. This phenomenon is well documented as already noted earlier. The association of Russian and Yiddish writers with the earlier stages of Chinese opening up and interaction with Western literature lends Jewish literature more depth and meaning that could come to symbolize continuity with earlier eras of openness and endow greater symbolic meaning, complexity and depth to the pursuit of and affection for literature of its kind and further study of Jewish themes.

The access point for some of the pioneers of Jewish Studies in China was via Western literature and works penned by Jews. An example in point is the career of Professor Xu Xin of Nanjing University, who graduated as an English major from Nanjing University in 1977 and began to teach English and American literature, with particular interest in Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud and Isaac Bashevis Singer. In 1986 he went to the United States on a research grant and was a guest in a Jewish home, where he started to develop deeper interests in Jewish religion and culture. On his return to China he started teaching Jewish history and developed a Jewish Studies curriculum and raised funds from Jewish philanthropists abroad to establish a Center for Jewish Studies at Nanjing University and build a Judaica library. He translated an abridged version of the *Encyclopedia Judaica* into Chinese (The Shanghai People's Publishing House, 1993). His success was reinforced by his wife's work as a travel agent helping arrange Jewish tours of China, which brought him into contact with many visiting Jewish-American tourists, who in turn helped him develop his ties with the American-Jewish establishment, arranged speaking tours and helped raise funds for a center for Jewish Studies and one of the first meaningful Jewish-Chinese academic encounters. His work as a tour guide stimulated his contacts with the descendants of the Jews of Kaifeng. He made efforts to assist them, and organized several meetings between them and American Jews, and became well known for two books and several articles on Kaifeng Judaism: *Legends of the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng*<sup>20</sup> and *The Jews of Kaifeng, China: History, Culture, and Religion*.<sup>21</sup>

Appointed a full professor in 1994, his efforts in the area of Jewish Studies were recognized by the university establishment. His contacts in Kaifeng appealed to a widespread Jewish fascination with the idea of Chinese Jews living in a forgotten Chinese province. He was invited to speak at synagogues and Jewish venues around the world, and achieved international Jewish acclaim. He has continued his academic study on the subject of anti-Semitism and has held annual conferences at the University of Nanjing on various topics including the Holocaust and Anti-Semitic Studies.

In 2004, I attended one of my first conferences with Professor Xu Xin at Nanjing University and, as well as the quality of papers and the number of

foreign scholars who had come to participate, I was pleasantly surprised that the cultural event preceding the conference featured a band playing the music of the Hasidic rabbi Shlomo Carlebach (with one Jewish member singing accompanied by Chinese musicians). This event attracted an audience of at least a thousand students, who at one point during the concert (admittedly when Professor Ghilad Zuckerman and I performed a number of Carlebach's songs) reached a fever pitch. It became evident that some aspects of Jewish culture had been, if only superficially, introduced to Chinese students. Xu Xin's contribution to Jewish cultural and historical studies ushered in a process which began to snowball, with other scholars taking up the mantle and perhaps even surpassing his efforts.

Zhong Zhiqing of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences began her studies researching the comparative literature related to Jewish and Chinese catastrophe; she shifted her focus to Israeli literature and edited three special issues on Contemporary Israeli Literature whilst an editor for a Chinese-language World Literature magazine. She has translated several important Israeli novels, including Amos Oz's *My Michael* (Yilin Press, 1998, winner of the China National Book Prize, 1999), Yehoshua Kenaz's *After the Holidays* (Baihuazhou Press, 2000, winner of the China National Book Prize in 2001), Amos Oz's *Black Box* (Shanghai Yiwén Press, 2004) and *A Tale of Love and Darkness* (2007), and a literary history *Modern Hebrew Fiction* (forthcoming) by Gershon Shaked, into Chinese, and has published quite a few articles and review essays on Hebrew literature. Her latest work, "A study of contemporary Israeli authors" (2006), is the first academic work in Chinese dealing with contemporary Israeli literature, which fills the gap in the field of foreign literary studies in China. Currently, she is working on what has been funded as a "national project" entitled "Twentieth-Century Hebrew literature in transition".

Another example of the function of literature in introducing scholars to Jewish studies is Professor Fu Xiaowei of Chongqing Foreign Languages University, who started her academic career studying literature and cross-cultural communication, and has since become a force in Jewish literature and Jewish translation studies. She describes her motives:

My interest in Jewish study came directly from my study of some Jewish American writers like Saul Bellow, Isaac Bashevis Singer and Bernard Malamud. The Jews and Jewish society in their novels are totally opposite to the stereotypes of Shylock in our minds, and like many other readers of these writers, I was anxious to know the reason why the Jews have been hated and persecuted in the West for centuries, and also the reason why the Jews are so clever and successful. This drove me to begin my study of Jewish culture and its acceptance and influence in Chinese literary circles.<sup>22</sup>

A number of doctoral students began their interest through departments of English language and English/American literature. Arising out of an



interest in Western themes and religion as well as curiosity in the passing references to Judaism in foreign literature, ambitious students attend classes in Jewish Studies. Their will to understand the cultural context of Jewish writers or themes brought them to conferences and summer schools. They commonly continue to translate into Chinese pieces of literature they love, and increasingly become connected to the object of their fascination (and dependent on it for academic promotion).

Increasing numbers of students of foreign literature as well as translators have and invariably will come to study Jewish history and culture as more Jewish writers are discovered and their cultural context is recognized as an important component of their writing. The same process will no doubt apply to the writings of philosophers and thinkers of Jewish origin as their religious contexts are viewed as important. This is happening in varying degrees with the study of Spinoza, Freud, Marx, Strauss, Levinas, Derrida and a pantheon of modern philosophers, historians and sociologists of Jewish origin.

### **“Jewish Fever” and the myth of Jewish wealth and power**

Corresponding to the academic interest in Jews and Judaism there has also been a more popular parallel counterpart: an interest in and fascination with Jewish wealth, power, influence and intelligence – what Chinese scholars called a “Jewish Fever”, discussed elsewhere in this book.

Driven by the commercial interest of publishers, 2004–05 alone witnessed dozens of books published in Chinese, with titles such as *How to Become a Jewish Millionaire* (when I informed an Hasidic businessman at the Shanghai synagogue about this book he enthusiastically implored me to get him a copy), *Sixty-five Portions of Jewish Wisdom* and *The Secrets of the Jews*. Most deal with financial, political and corporate subjects, appeal to superficial stereotypes of Jews as rich and powerful, and do not venture into the body of Jewish thinking, spirituality and ethics in any meaningful way.

The Western media have also taken an interest in China’s “Jewish Fever”. Ariana Eunjung Cha describes some of the superficial interest in Jewish-related subjects in an article in the *Washington Post*: “‘Success’ books have become very popular in China and sales are high, making up a third of the works published in China selling upwards of 30,000 copies of a book per year.”<sup>23</sup> The “secrets” of Jewish entrepreneurs are of particular interest to these Chinese readers; for example, *The Eight Most Valuable Business Secrets of the Jews*, *The Legend of Jewish Wealth* and *Jewish People and Business: The Bible of How to Live Their Lives*. Ms Cha researched the sources of some of these books and their “famous” authors, and discovered they were ghost-written without a known author and the sources were of dubious origins. She quotes He Xiong Fe, a visiting professor in Nankai University’s literature department, who estimates that “more than half of the books are fakes, written by people who are not familiar with Judaism or Jewish history and who have made up their qualifications”. Several of the books, despite their



covers, focus on basic business acumen that has little to do with religion or culture or Judaism.

The literature does not suggest that Jews are dishonest or benefit from profit – on the contrary, it depicts Jewish people as honest and their business culture as being hard-working – none the less it presents stereotypes and superficial generalizations with which many Chinese are enthralled and which they admire deeply, wishing to learn the skills so as to emulate such prowess. While in the West this would be considered anti-Semitic literature, in China it is an expression of admiration for the Jewish people and an endorsement of their inspired culture. Many of the ideas expressed in this literature are directly informed by anti-Semitic works including the Chinese translations of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.<sup>24</sup>

The different interpretive modes of Chinese and others are another fascinating subject of potential research. “Jewish Fever” seems to have had a positive effect in spurring more empirical studies of Jewish texts. The abundance of mythological and disproportional attributes of Jews and the wisdom of Jewish learning necessitated and likely precipitated a next stage of more careful scholarly attention to the study of Judaism. The same texts which were blindly venerated in superficial ways without even having been read are now being translated and treated more earnestly.

However, even in academia some of these perceptions still exist. On more than a dozen occasions I have come across undergraduate students who applied to study Jewish philosophy, some sitting in a semester of classes in Talmud, motivated out of the desire that exposure to Jewish philosophy would rub its business genius and acumen off on to them. On several occasions students of business administration and commerce have asked to attend my classes for the same reason. There is reason to believe that some postgraduate students share similar hopes, perhaps reckoning that graduating in Jewish Studies may impress future employers and help them secure more senior or more highly paid positions.

It is not clear where this fad will end and how long publishers can take advantage of the interest in Jews. The negative effects of these distortions cannot yet be known, especially in a nation with residual socialist sentiments and strong feelings about inequality. The obvious question is when will the backlash come, and what form and what degree of severity will it take?

### **Omission, misunderstandings and distortions of Judaism**

Many errors and distortions abound in China about Jews and Judaism. While a great deal of this is dispensed by superficial and popular works, many misunderstandings are promulgated in serious academic writings, either in analytical monographs written by Chinese scholars, or in translations of literature or academic works. Despite conceptual and factual errors, they are none the less published by recognized university and academic presses, and endorsed by academic departments. Some works which describe Jews in

unfavorable terms are informed by anti-Semitic literature or works not always received in the literary spirit intended.

Professor Fu Xiaowei's survey of student attitudes to Jewish-related issues reveals a general omission of the study of Jewish culture from the mainstream of university syllabi and, beyond superficial generalizations, reflects an ignorance of Jewish contributions to world culture and Western theory. Fu Xiaowei observes serious misreading and oversights of the Jewish religion in some scholarly works; she notes Chinese studies of Jacques Derrida, Walter Benjamin and Heinz Fromm in particular. She argues that this emerges from the problem of "mistaking the part for the whole, in this case mistaking the Kabbalah for the entirety of Judaism". The general omission by Chinese scholars of the role of Jewish culture in the formation of contemporary Western theories is based primarily on the assumption that Christianity is an evolved form of Hebrew civilization and that, as long as they take into account Christianity, they need not understand the minute dynamics of Judaism. Many scholars rashly believe what they were taught or had read in Christian-based scholarship – that ancient Judaism had been replaced by Christianity, in the same way that the Old Testament was replaced by the New Testament.<sup>25</sup> "Replacement theology", an ideology engendered by the church to de-emphasize the centrality of Judaism, has made distinct inroads into the formation of the educated echelons of Chinese society. Most Chinese scholars did not question or challenge the motives of Christians as they learned that Christianity had replaced Judaism. The many scholars on the Jewish and Chinese sides of the discourse who have pronounced with enthusiasm on the specific dynamism of Jewish–Chinese relations because of the absence of Christian biases may be surprised that the work of missionaries over recent centuries in establishing schools and universities throughout China has succeeded, subtly without them knowing the extent, in imparting certain attitudes and biases which scholars of Jewish Studies now need to redress.

Fu Xiaowei describes how translations of literary, theological and historical works have been innocently misunderstood and/or mistranslated to depict Jewish concepts outside their intended meaning and especially blurring their distinctiveness from Christianity. The Chinese translator of Isaac Bashevis Singer, for example, refers to the messiah by the Chinese character for "Jesus Christ", without appreciating that the Jewish messiah precluded this possibility.<sup>26</sup> Any understanding of Judaism while using this translation is bound to fail or cause the reader frustration. This misrepresentation not only misguides readers' perceptions of Judaism but also causes serious misunderstandings and prejudices of Jews and the modern state of Israel.

Professor Fu Xiaowei observes:

According to my survey, the misunderstandings mainly come from teachers and scholars and from their lectures and books. For example, the graduate students in my university mainly got the impression that

Christianity is more advanced than Judaism after they took the course “Bible as Literature”. Scholars giving lectures on the Bible as Literature are unaware of the differences between Christianity and Judaism. Some of the researchers of Western culture have more negative impressions of the Jews and Israel.

The college students’ perception of the Jew, Judaism and Christianity are like this: The Jews and Israelis (the two words are interchangeable in China) are clever, successful, combative and aggressive. The Bible (the bound volume of Old and New Testament) is the holy scripture of the Jews and Christians; Jesus is the messiah worshipped by both the Jews and Christians; Christianity is really more advanced than Judaism.

The errors appear in two areas. The first is in the teaching, discussion, writing and analysis of Jewish-related subjects. These misunderstandings may be attributed to different frames of reference, naïveté, partial understanding, and the grapple with phenomena and events, together with differing cultural perspectives. It may be that this is a natural course in the evolving discourse on the subject. Over time, with reference to correct sources and with the training of more informed teachers and writers, the discourse can be steered to a more rigorous and informed study of Jewish issues.

The more problematic second area, where errors regularly occur, and where the greatest obstacle to the proper discourse of the subject takes place, is in the mistranslation and/or misrendering of Jewish-related material of literature, of primary sources and of secondary analysis.

The analysis of Fu Xiaowei published in Chinese journals exposing the oversights and carelessness of literature relating to Jewish subjects will no doubt necessitate a response of greater caution on the part of academics and translators of future material. Furthermore, the work of Fu Youde in training more informed scholars and initiating more careful translations is a start.

## **Historical Jewish presence in China**

The historical presence of Jews in China must be divided into a number of timeframes: the Jews of Kaifeng from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries requires a more detailed discussion elsewhere; the Baghdadi Jews from 1820 until the 1940s; the Russian Jews who resided in Harbin from 1910 until the 1940s, some of whom proliferated throughout China, a few remained and shared its destiny during the 1950s to the 1970s, during the period when China closed its doors to the West until the gradual opening-up process; the German Jews residing in Shanghai from 1930 to the 1940s, some of whom also remained in China. In addition, there were foreign experts and guests who either came from the first three groups or in other ways arrived in China and participated in its modern history; some became heroes and icons of the Chinese people, and symbols, whether intentional or not, of Jewish–Chinese relations.<sup>27</sup>

These waves of immigration contributed to the mosaic of Jewish cultural history as well as forming a part of Chinese history which contributes to the corpus of Chinese–Jewish Studies, and necessitates continued investigation and academic research on the part of Chinese and Western scholars. As the Jewish contribution to China becomes more clear, it also forms the foundations of a Chinese–Jewish narrative and a basis for continued collaboration on various levels.

It would be interesting to understand more completely the relationship between the presence of Russian and German Jews in China from the 1910s to the late 1940s and the corresponding interest in Russian and Yiddish translations of Jewish-related novels into Chinese. Studies of the Jewish newspapers and literature published in Harbin and Shanghai at the time reveal fascinating inter-cultural relations. The influence of Jews in disseminating communist material as well as acting as a medium between East and West is a subject of fascination. The historical figures of Morris “Two Gun” Cohen, the bodyguard/intelligence advisor to Sun Yet Sen and the role of Jacob Rosenfeld as private doctor to Chairman Mao, and dozens of other fascinating stories of Jewish heroism and adventure, may one day earn a position within mainstream Chinese cultural studies.

One can only wonder how, if China had not isolated herself, and revolution had not had so profound an effect, and if Jews had remained in greater numbers in China, history may have been different and the Jewish–Chinese encounter may have expanded in ways which we cannot now envision.

Another interesting area of research is the extent of the Baghdadi Jewish community’s influence in Shanghai and Hong Kong in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries on Chinese literary/intellectual productivity, and if Arabic or Judeo-Arabic works from this period were translated into Chinese.

The former Jewish residents of China via their umbrella organization, Igud Yotzei Sin, based in Tel Aviv, have become an important voice of dialogue and friendship within several provincial governments including Harbin, Tianjin and Shanghai. The relationship nurtured between municipal and provincial government officials of Harbin is notable in particular.

The involvement of the Chinese Communist Party in deepening ties with the former Jewish residents of China, especially of Harbin, is interesting. It reflects, though to a lesser degree, the view in Beijing, and the party’s line, of enhancing Jewish–Chinese ties via the historical link with former Jewish communities. This may be related to the efforts of Israel Epstein and other Jewish Chinese Communist Party members who over the years they lived in China maintained contact with members of the former Jewish enclaves now dispersed around the world and facilitated links with senior party members in Beijing.

Of course, by emphasizing and building upon the hospitality and refuge of Jewish refugees during World War II, China presents itself as tolerant and humane, and any effort to emphasize this relationship cannot be bad. Over a dozen volumes have been written about the life of the Jewish refugees in

China, and the subject continues to be a source of co-empathy between Jews and Chinese. Authored mainly by Jews, Chinese scholars are beginning to explore this component of their modern history, supported by a number of important government patrons.

Zhao Qizheng, former chairman of the news office of the State Council and now a member of the Standing Committee of the Communist Party People's Consultative Committee (CPPCC), describes how he became acquainted with Jewish-related studies and how he hoped to use these as a foundation for continued relations:

I came to know about the relationship between the Jewish people and China when I was deputy mayor of Shanghai. After I came to Beijing to work as a minister, I started to encourage scholars in Shanghai, Harbin, and Tianjin to work together for the aim of finding out more material about the Jewish people in China, which will help to reconstruct history more exactly. I once suggested making a related film and many people supported my idea, such as American scientist and writer Robert Kuss and famous Chinese director Daolin Sun. . . . In recent years I promoted and encouraged publishing three picture books about Jewish people . . . we collected stories about the Jewish people in Shanghai, Harbin and Tianjin. Also there is a part about stories in Kaifeng . . . there are thirteen million Jews in the world, I have an ambition, publishing 1.3 million copies is a great success.<sup>28</sup>

Several Chinese and Jewish bodies have collaborated to commemorate the existence of the Jewish community of Harbin. In 2004 there was a monumental celebration of the community with prominent Chinese-Jewish dignitary Israel Epstein in attendance in one of his last public appearances before his death the following year. This celebration success led to another one two years later in June 2006. The list of Chinese and Israeli dignitaries, leaders, representatives and scholars in attendance, under the patronage of the Heilongjiang government, the Provincial Communist Party and the Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences, suggested that this forum was fully endorsed by all levels of government and academia as the correct and legitimate way forward for Jewish–Chinese relations.

The initiative necessitated several levels of Jewish studies to be condoned, including access to the archives and records of the Jewish community, the renovation of Jewish artifacts, synagogues, gravesites, schools and so on, which in turn necessitated understanding Jewish customs and consultation with experts, and the preparation of an exhibition on the late Israel Epstein, which required a curator and opened another discipline of Jewish cultural studies in the commemoration of several prominent Chinese Jews.

It also required the publishing of books on the Jewish community and the recording of personal accounts of Jewish community members and of Chinese who had recollections of their presence. It also indirectly encouraged other

scholars of Jewish Studies in Harbin to accelerate their research to deliver at the biannual academic congress held in Harbin.<sup>29</sup>

At the 2006 conference, Li Yanzhi, vice-commissioner of Heilongjiang Province, China Communist Party Committee member and Minister of Propaganda in Heilongjiang Province, expressed the perceived nexus between Jews and Chinese:

The history of Jewish life in Harbin is a testament to the brilliant world humanitarian record and the warm and kind treatment the Jews in Harbin received . . . they came here to keep themselves away from the anti-Semitic wave in Russia and Europe. Harbin people, with their unique and broad-minded hospitality accepted and developed long lasting friendships with them.

During their life here, the Jewish people contributed immensely to the development and prosperity of the city. In politics they once helped the Communist International establish the secret news agency, ceaselessly passing onto China the successful experiences of the development and struggles of the Communist Party in other countries . . . hence the name the Red Silk Road.

The provincial and municipal governments have tried their very best to preserve the historical relics and we have spent millions of yuan renovating the Jewish cemetery, the Jewish hall and other relevant important buildings, and the construction of the Memorial Hall of Jewish History and Culture . . . which will have international influence.

. . . moreover we have twice sponsored the International Forum on the History and Culture of Harbin Jews, helped publish the large book entitled *Jews in Harbin*, and furthered the research into Harbin Jewish history and culture. These significant measures show that the Chinese are a nation that cherishes history, friendship and emotions. The purpose of this forum is to further research into Harbin Jewish history and culture; deepen friendships and cooperation between the two nations; promote cultural communication and commercial cooperation with Israel in Heilongjiang Province . . . attract more and more Jews to tour, invest and enjoy the grace of the city. . . .

I believe the traditional friendship between the Jewish people and Heilongjiang people will surely become the cornerstone of economic co-operation and cultural communication . . . in welcoming the Jews who once lived and worked in Harbin and their descendants, as well as the Jews from all over the world and all the nations to visit and invest here. We will have a perfect future.<sup>30</sup>

In another address we observe how the former Jewish community existence in China is becoming a basis and pretext for future relations. Shi Jiaxing, secretary of Harbin Daoli District China Communist Party Committee, commented:

We attach great importance to the research, excavation, protection, repair and exploration of Jewish relics and hosting the International Forum on the History and Culture of Harbin Jews . . . Today it is our honor to co-host the forum. Our purpose is to accurately and completely revive an episode of history, studying and exploring the laws and traces of its development, discovering the historic lines, along which the two nations accepted and tolerated each other and cooperated and worked together and applying and promoting the values within which two cultures that worked peacefully and learned from each other, gaining mutual benefit and development. In addition we aim to build a bridge and pave the way for the network of the two nations towards friendly co-operation and co-development.

Another discussion between a party official, Zheng Qihong, and Shimon Peres suggests that the cooperative existence of the Jewish communities in China are viewed as a welcome basis for developing a cultural narrative on which to build relations:

. . . in order to show the friendship between the Jews and the Chinese during WWII and the priority of Jewish culture, I am encouraging the filmmakers at home and abroad to make a movie on the Jews in China . . . for years there have been books in China on Jewish culture and history. We should translate some fine ones into English or Hebrew . . . cultural communication is the basis of political exchange and economic cooperation. Many things can go smoothly with a complete cultural communication as the basis.<sup>31</sup>

The Igud Yotzei Sin has functioned for over fifty-five years. Apart from maintaining open channels between Jewish immigrants from China spanning the world, the organization is expanding its networks to second and third generations of descendants and to those interested in Jewish–Chinese relations in general. It offers social support for farming folk and scholarships for students. It publishes an annual bulletin and newssheet; arranges trips to China; their representatives, chief amongst them chairman Teddy Kaufman, attend conferences and congresses, speaking to media and officials.

As these landmen get old and pass on, or as the Chinese experience in common with landmen fades from memory, the question remains what will become of the organization and its functions. It seems that they are expanding to embrace the broader Jewish–Chinese association, most evident in the funding of scholarships, not only for children of landmen but also for Chinese students wishing to study in Israel. The role of this organization will need redefinition over the coming years before its *raison d'être* becomes defunct.



## **Jewish foreign experts, Jewish heroes and guests throughout Chinese history**

Matthias Messmer gives the best treatise of this phenomenon of Jewish foreign experts who contributed to modern China. Others like Israel Epstein, Dr Jacob Rosenfeld and Dr Robert Politzer became local heroes.<sup>32</sup> These personalities may become the subject of continual investigation in Chinese academia and popular legend amongst Chinese. The leaders of the Heilongjiang Provincial Party Committee and Provincial Government sent an eight-person documentary team composed of Judaic researchers from the Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences and a film and television company from Beijing to interview former Jewish residents of China. They even went to Austria to research the life of Jacob Rosenfeld:

We won't forget him, as an exemplar model respected abroad, for his great contribution to enhancing the understanding between people, although the record of his glorious short life wasn't written into history books.<sup>33</sup>

Several other bodies are seeking to do documentaries and films on these issues. No doubt it will inform the cascading levels of Jewish–Chinese cultural relations for time to come.

## **Jewish tourism**

Elsewhere in this volume I discuss the role of the tourist industry in advancing Jewish–Chinese relations. Suffice it here to mention that Jewish tourism to China intersects a number of areas in Jewish and Chinese studies. The preservation of tourist venues such as synagogues, cemeteries and Jewish artifacts and archives as tourist attractions is an important consideration for local government policy, which views tourism as one of its windows to the outside world. The better to cater to tourism, the training of informed tour guides is necessary. A number of Chinese scholars are learning more about Jewish subjects in general and Chinese-Jewish subjects in particular, and a home-grown literature is in the making.

## **The Kaifeng connection**

The subject of Kaifeng Jewish studies deserves greater attention than possible here. It has spawned a number of dynamics including: regular foreign tourism; requests for preservation of sites; need for training of informed tour guides (several of whom subsequently became interested in pursuing academic Jewish studies); rally point for a political lobby; and international Jewish pressure to address the issue of Jewish recognition in China.

To wonder how there could have been an isolated, but intact, community of Jews in China for over a thousand years has fascinated the Jewish imagination. There are probably more books and articles on the subject than on any other subject relating to Chinese-Jewish studies, although this is steadily changing. A small number of books about Kaifeng are authored by Chinese scholars, the bulk by overseas academics. Much of the tourism industry to Kaifeng is sustained by interest in the Jewish community there, starting with visits and exchange of letters between them and the Baghdadi Jews of Shanghai; contacts with Christian missionaries; and visits by Russian and European Jews during the Cultural Revolution.<sup>34</sup>

While in the past some free-minded Chinese scholars ventured to study the Kaifeng Jewish phenomenon,<sup>35</sup> and several Chinese documentaries have also been made on the subject,<sup>36</sup> today it is considered a delicate and awkward subject best left without comment. Over past decades this subject has been deemed by government officials to be very sensitive. Owing to the unlikelihood of promotion and the difficulties of publishing on the subject, few ambitious Chinese academics will touch the Kaifeng issue. It is rarely discussed in contemporary Chinese academia and is not viewed as relevant or connected to the growing body of Jewish Studies at Chinese universities. Legitimized by government, there is an almost invisible wall of cognitive dissonance between the studies of overseas Jews and Jewish Studies.

In an earlier article co-authored with Liang Pingan, we relate the Chinese interest in Kaifeng Jews.<sup>37</sup> Kong Xianyi, a well-known historian who taught at a local Kaifeng high school, and was a member of the Kaifeng Political Consultative Conference, drafted a request entitled "The reconstruction of the Kaifeng synagogue for the purpose of attracting foreign tourists". Members who attended the meeting supported his suggestions and took it as the best plan to help improve the local economy. Local authorities rejected it, fearing national or provincial government opposition.

In the early 1970s, Wang Yisha, a historian and a former curator of the Kaifeng Municipal Museum, began to investigate Chinese Judaism. Taking advantage of his post, he studied much written material about Kaifeng Judaism in the museum's collection; he also made friends with many Kaifeng Jewish descendants. Wang conducted countless interviews, studied diaries and established archives. He journeyed across China, with virtually no funding, to cities where the Chinese Jews were scattered, to support his research; the limited museum budget was unable to assist him in any way.

Wang was the first local scholar on Kaifeng Judaism and, as such, was visited by many foreign Jewish scholars and historians. Unfortunately, he was forced to retire at the age of 50, which is rare in Chinese academia unless someone has incurred official discredit. From then on Wang spent all his time sorting out the files and materials he had collected over the years. He established the Kaifeng Research Institute on Ancient Jewish Culture in 1992 and was elected its standing president. In 1994 he published his first book, *The Spring and Autumn of Kaifeng Judaism*. He died of cancer in 1996,

leaving his children nothing but his numerous files, which have not been investigated again since.

Several other initiatives to preserve and enhance the scholarship of Kaifeng Jewry have been attempted, described in more detail elsewhere. Liang Pingan, who is now a senior fellow at the Middle East Studies Institute-Shanghai International Studies University and at the Center for Jewish and Israeli Studies at the Social Sciences Academy of Shanghai, began his interest in Jewish affairs as a tour guide in Kaifeng.<sup>38</sup> He relates:

I started to approach Jewish Studies in China when I picked up my first job as a tour guide for Jewish groups in my hometown, Kaifeng. I discovered later it was also the only city where the first Jewish Diaspora had been sheltered as early as in 988CE.

Stories of the Holocaust told by visiting Jewish tourists shocked me so deeply that I decided to take up the diasporas of China as my life's business. I was a voluntary interpreter and also a private secretary for Mr. Wang Yisha, the well-known scholar of Chinese Judaism. I helped him to arrange, correct and sort out some of his manuscripts for publication in this field. I was one of the founders of the Kaifeng Institute for Research on the History of the Ancient Chinese Jews, and continue to serve as the Secretary General and support the initiative for the Construction of Kaifeng Synagogue Museum. Since 1987, I have submitted to several official bodies a draft proposal entitled "Rescuing Kaifeng Jewish Heritages Before it is too Late". In 1989, I organized and participated in the translation of the major academic work authored by Bishop William White "Chinese Jews" and the translation of Pearl Buck's "Peony" in 1995. . . . My life's research on "the Origins of Chinese Jews" is still a work in progress owing to the poor details and materials, but it remains my life goal.<sup>39</sup>

Many of the first Chinese scholars of Judaism, including Xu Xin, Pan Guang, Fu Youde and Zhang Qianhong, took initial interest in the Jews of Kaifeng. This was motivated out of both genuine curiosity for the orphan community and necessity, as many overseas Jews inquired about the Kaifeng Jews and Jewish Studies scholars were expected to be conversant on the subject. As the position of the authorities became more clear and inflexible, a distinct delineation between academic familiarity with the subject and willingness to support the efforts to renew a Jewish community evolved amongst these scholars. Unlike in other countries, academics are unlikely to exert influence or be a lobby to open up a discipline of investigation or support a social policy.

The attempts to rebuild a Jewish community in Kaifeng have attracted the attention of overseas academics, and raised interest in popular and academic articles and documentaries. Curious situations occur where many Jewish tourists and scholars visit Chinese centers of Jewish Studies to find

out more about the Kaifeng Jewish descendants, and are met with polite but short answers and a hope that their curiosity is steered to other areas of more free discussion.

While the study of Kaifeng and other ancient Jewish settlements in China is of great interest to many, no more material beyond the little already found is known to exist. Perhaps the absence of archeological, archival or other scholarly material relating to the Kaifeng community leads any interest or discussion on it to its present condition.

Attempts to open new areas of Kaifeng studies are being explored, including new translations/interpretations of the stele which may indicate the nature of the theology of Chinese Jews and of Jewish–Confucian thought in the light of Kaifeng Jewish synthesis. Lin Ying, a young Chinese scholar in the Department of History at Zhongshan University, is developing an argument that Jewish converts of the Khazar kingdom were the first Jewish travelers to China and to settle in Kaifeng, preceding the remnants of the community that later existed.<sup>40</sup> The likelihood that theological and religious texts belonging to the Jewish community were written and preserved in the Chinese language is strong, given the evidence that Chinese Jews used Confucian references and imagery. The task of distinguishing Jewish works from other Chinese works is more difficult, and requires training in various disciplines and profound familiarity with certain periods of Chinese history and literature, and the same with periods in Jewish history and literature, as well as in archeology and various languages from Chinese to Hebrew to Farsi. Only well-trained scholars of Chinese history and language, combined with a familiarity with Jewish thought, could help in the investigation of texts which fit this description. Perhaps one day a significant find will open this subject to less speculation and legitimize it as an important archeological–cultural site in China and pave the way for more Chinese scholars to take an interest.

The Jewish descendants themselves are also developing learning skills in Jewish religion and theology. Some have gone to Israel to study; others are learning locally. Only time will tell if this group will generate a meaningful core of scholars in Jewish Studies, religion and tradition. It has been interesting to observe the reaction of Jewish descendants who have attended Jewish Studies courses and seminars, and also how Han Chinese learn and appreciate Jewish-related themes. This is something I observed first-hand as descendants came to my home in Jinan and celebrated the Sabbath and festivals, and attended classes and watched as my students read Hebrew fluently and knew many of the significances of Jewish custom and teachings. Observing this may have legitimized it in their eyes and given them further motivation to make it a part of their own lives.

Some of the descendants are availing themselves of translated Jewish texts to read and develop an understanding of core philosophical ideas. As this trend continues, a new area of Jewish Studies can open in China, relating to the material as a religious and spiritual system, not just a culture. At least one Jewish descendant is undertaking the translation of the *siddur* (Jewish

prayer book) into Chinese, which when complete can introduce theological and religious components into the discourse of Jewish Studies.

### **The art, theater and film industry**

Jewish-related fields have at least equal appeal to counter-cultural elements amongst Chinese artists, authors and poets. The creative, psychological, mystical, artistic, literary, tragic, symbolic, comedic, cynical, radical, revolutionary and alternative dimensions prevalent in the Jewish corpus have lent themselves to ideologues, artists, the disenfranchised and the downtrodden. As the language and geographic divide slips away, this trend is also likely to burgeon.

Work of Jewish artists and creative minds in the mainstream entertainment industry in the United States, Europe, Russia and Australia, and Jewish influence in the film, publishing and production sectors, has brought leading Chinese artists and Jewish artists and producers together in relative early stages of the Jewish–Chinese nexus. A disproportionate number of leading/published internationally renowned Chinese artists, singers, poets, authors, translators, critics, theater and movie directors, playwrights and cultural leaders have therefore come into contact with Jews and some aspects of Jewish culture. Stories abound of struggling Chinese artists who meet Jews in New York, Paris or London who take an interest in their work and collaborate with them, support them, help them find their first opportunity and continue to patronize their work until they are well known. No doubt over time more of these meetings will be recorded, contributing to the growing incidence of Jewish–Chinese encounters and to the flourishing synergy between Jewish and Chinese culture.

As mentioned above, several scripts and movies have or are being made about Jewish–Chinese-related themes, which further commits writers, directors and actors to expanded knowledge of the subject as well as informing large numbers of viewers.

### **Christian Bible and theological studies**

Christian and biblical studies/theology have been studied in China from the arrival of Nestorian Christians in Changan, modern Xian, from 635CE. A stele excavated in Xi'an in 1625 records a Chinese translation of the Hebrew Bible dating back to 781CE.<sup>41</sup>

An interesting dimension of Jewish and biblical studies in China is elucidated by Professor Irene Eber in her account of S. I. J. Schereschewsky (1831–1906), a Lithuanian-born Jew who became an Episcopal bishop.<sup>42</sup> In her book, Eber discusses Schereschewsky's Jewish youth in Eastern Europe, his conversion to Christianity, his study for the priesthood in an American seminary, his journeys to Shanghai and Beijing, his tasks as Episcopal bishop in Shanghai and the founding of St John's University. Additionally she looked at the process in which Schereschewsky translated the Hebrew Bible and his

degree of familiarity with Hebrew and Jewish sources, and how this influenced his translation, and the impressions he left on Chinese Christianity.

The gradual liberalization of the study of Christianity, the Bible and religion within the Chinese university framework has also paved the way for greater academic interest in Jewish theology, biblical studies scholarship and interpretation, and translation of the Hebrew Bible. China started a Hebrew-language program at Peking University in 1985. Professor Zhang Ping of Tel Aviv University, one of the prominent scholars comparing classical Chinese and Jewish philosophies, was one of the dozen or so students in the first class. Professor Chen Yiyi notes that “by the time China and Israel established an embassy level diplomatic relationship in 1992, these students were already fluent speakers of Modern Hebrew”.<sup>43</sup> Chen continues to describe the development of Hebrew Bible studies:

Professor Zhu Weizhi (1905–1999) from Nankai University, one of the scholars trained before Communist China, started to recruit and advise graduate students in biblical literature in the early 1980s. Among his protégés, Professor Liang Gong, now at Henan University, directs a center for biblical literature and has trained a few dozen graduate students who read the Hebrew and Greek Bibles as a literary work.

The study of the Hebrew Bible in China also gained momentum through the work of Professor Archie Lee of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Professor Chen remarks:

During the last decade, Professor Lee has trained over ten graduate students with the most strenuous methodology according to Western standards . . . these students are native Chinese speakers, and most of them are from mainland China. Many of them have started or will soon start to teach Hebrew Bible studies in universities all over mainland China. This fresh wave of scholars will eventually bring the standard of Chinese university students’ understanding of the book to a significantly higher level. . . .<sup>44</sup>

Lee’s work comparing the translations of the names of God in Asian cultures is of great interest to Jewish and translation studies.

The role of overseas Christian organizations, in their missionary and scholarly forms, has also contributed to the popularizing of Jewish Studies in China.

The denominational differences between Christian groups, and their perspective on Jews and Hebrew studies, generate a desire amongst Chinese students and scholars to access Jewish sources directly to clarify the reasons for tensions and disagreement. Many Evangelical groups share a positive perspective of Jews and the role of Israel in world affairs which also contributes to student and popular interest in understanding Jews, Judaism and Israel.

An innovative project supported by Chinese Christian business interests based in Hong Kong, under the academic direction of Dr Andi Wu of GrapeCity Inc., is developing a cantillation-based Chinese translation of the Hebrew Bible. The principle is to use the cantillation notes which accompany the Hebrew Bible as a form of commentary and to translate the Bible using the Hebrew original. This was of particular interest to my own students, who were studying the cantillation marks and so some participated in part of this project.

Interest in Jewish Studies and the Jewish roots of Christianity has the potential to develop in China as it has in other countries. Chinese Christians have remained in a state of relative non-development, but their numbers are growing. As Carol Hamrin writes:

They are still too weak to generate a dramatic change in Chinese civic life, focused as they are on survival and the care of their members. They have not yet articulated a vision, nor do they have the freedom necessary for taking on this larger role . . . all the Christians have to do is grow in numbers status and financial resources needed in terms of social capital and spiritual capital.<sup>45</sup>

The indifference of Chinese Christianity to European church history and politics may contribute to an even more intense interest amongst Chinese Christians in the religion of Jesus. Though Judaizing amongst Chinese Christians (embrace of Jewish ideas and practices to varying degrees, the most extreme being full conversion to Judaism) has not yet occurred to the degree it has abroad, as more accurate accounts of Church history become known, together with gradual exposure to trends in Jewish theology, the horizons for Jewish theological studies may extend to the approximately 60–100-million-strong Christian population who are, in the main, disenfranchised from any academic structures or frameworks of higher education.<sup>46</sup>

Churches and theological seminaries in China have continually studied the Bible, and some teach Hebrew to their students. A number of priests and pastors have attended summer schools in Jewish Studies and are becoming aware of the Jewish component in their own religious pursuits. As more travel abroad, considering the trends in world Christianity, this interest in Jewish- and Hebrew-related sources is more likely to gain momentum than lose it.<sup>47</sup>

### **Chinese converts and seekers of Jewish spiritualism**

Chinese conversion to Judaism stimulates a different dimension of Jewish Studies not accessible from within the academic framework: its theological, interpretive, spiritual, mystical currents. As Jewish tradition is practised, prayers and songs learned, festivals celebrated, and kosher food prepared, Jewish Studies becomes a source of spiritual meaning, not – or at least not only – an academic pursuit. Judaism's interpretation of texts and its explanation of historical events appeal to many with biblical and Christian backgrounds.



Even though only a relatively small number of Chinese are familiar with biblical ideas, amongst those that are, the likelihood of a passing interest in Jewish religion and practice significantly increases.

From amongst the half-dozen Han Chinese I know with deep religious leanings to Judaism, all began this process in the study of Christianity and then moved on to what they perceived as its source in Judaism. They did this without contact with outside Jewish people or organizations, though they had access to online materials and translations. One such person recounts:

More than ten years ago, I met a Christian missionary. He gave me an English Bible and an English–Chinese New Testament. I had heard of the book in my youth, but never had a chance to read it. After a few days of reading, I found it kind of interesting. Since the Chinese version was translated about a century ago, I began to use the English version, which uses contemporary language, and found it more readable.

As I read in both English and Chinese I noticed that in some verses the English and Chinese versions do not match each other. Then I learned from other books that the Bible was originally written in Hebrew. I managed to learn the Hebrew language because I wanted to know why the translations were different. With basic knowledge of Hebrew, the Bible became even more amazing than I ever thought. Moreover, the Hebrew language also opened a door to another profound culture – Judaism. In summary, I gradually became involved in Jewish Studies because I wanted to examine the validity of different translations. . . . I feel classic Jewish writings are much better than Christian documents. . . . Now I am more interested in Judaism itself rather than the difference between Judaism and Christianity. I plan to read a bit of Talmud every few days over the next Jewish year.<sup>48</sup>

There are also attempts to fuse Judaism and Christianity. Given the absence of a European church history in the Chinese consciousness, Chinese Christians are less likely to retain theological tension with Jewish ideas.

As the 100 million or so affiliates of various denominations of Christianity in China acquire a better education, move from the rural classes to the middle classes, develop their theological predilection from superstitious tendencies and spirit-oriented worship towards history, theology, Bible study and interpretation, they will increasingly become interested in Jewish-related material. As the Bible becomes the primary source for theological authority, many may be drawn to Jewish-related teachings. Although not intended for them, the work of earlier decades of academic translations of Jewish texts into Chinese may find their most ardent readers in Chinese Christian readership.

### **International affairs and the Arab–Israeli conflict**

Not a few scholars of Jewish-related studies began their interests/careers in international relations and Middle Eastern studies. Until 1992, China's

position regarding Israel was considered by many to be “openly hostile” and “anti-Israeli”.<sup>49</sup>

A good deal of popular-interest books translated into Chinese relate to the Arab–Israeli conflict.<sup>50</sup> Israelis were portrayed in media reports as being aggressive, as oppressors of the Palestinian people and as a source of unnecessary tension in the Middle East, and perceived to be argumentative. The distinction between Jews and Israelis was not appreciated and was generally glossed over, so that, despite a reputation for being clever, wealthy and long-suffering, Jews were also perceived by many as being aggressive and militant. The semi-secret military exchanges between Israel and China over the period before diplomatic relations were established did not help the impression of Israel as an offensive military entity.

The beginning of diplomatic relations between Israel and China marked a change in government-controlled media outlets, and reporting on Israel started to become more balanced. Combined with overseas internet access and Chinese-language websites built by enthusiastic individuals determined to provide balanced, or even pro-Israel news and opinions, public opinion shifted. The online debates which eventually caused the shift in public opinion were surveyed by Professor Zhang Ping and they offer a fascinating insight into the contribution of the internet to a re-appraisal of Jews and Israel in the eyes of Chinese.<sup>51</sup> The old impressions were even portrayed as mistaken and distortions the result of government control of the media.

Owing to the Chinese dependence on oil, the public is sensitive to affairs in the Middle East and seeks to better understand the problems. Naturally scholars have taken sides and developed their interests – it is unclear what ratio of scholars incline to what side of the conflict – but the discourse has produced a broader interest in Judaism and Jewish-related works. A number of research centers were set up to study it, and scholars were trained in Hebrew and Arabic and in areas related to the conflict.

An example of this is the Center for Israel and Jewish Studies at the Social Science Academy of Shanghai, which, under Professor Pang Guang, originally advised government bodies on the political ramifications of the Arab–Israeli conflict and gradually moved into more focused areas of Israel and Jewish political studies.

Distinguished journalists and editors are continually invited by the Israeli embassy in Beijing to participate in study tours of Israel. As they participate and see Israel first-hand, convene with Jewish leaders, visit the Holocaust Museum and engage in the life of the country, many have subsequently expressed deep appreciation and affection for Israel and consequently contributed important articles regarding Israel and the Jewish people, which, in turn, began to change the perception in China that Israel was an aggressor in the Israeli–Arab conflict.<sup>52</sup> There have been opposite trends, too, as pro Israel Chinese visited Israel and were treated with disdain or suspicion, or were not given the treatment and deference they believed they deserved, and they altered their perceptions, becoming anti-Israel and sometimes anti-Jewish.<sup>53</sup>

Other scholars attest to disappointment at seeing modern Israel and how it conflicted with their perceptions of the People of the Book and of Jews being intellectual and thoughtful people.

The establishment of a course for the study of Hebrew at Peking University in 1985 was primarily motivated by the need to prepare Hebrew-speaking diplomats, spies and advisors for the impending diplomatic relationship. As noted above, one of the foremost Chinese scholars of Judaism, Professor Zhang Ping, now at Tel Aviv University, graduated from this class. He subsequently translated the *Ethics of the Fathers* into Chinese and continues to delve into Talmudic and later Jewish thought. Other graduates of the course, initially motivated by politics and international relations, continue to gravitate into other areas of Jewish and Israeli studies.

### **Internet and online resources**

The relaxing of restrictions on internet access in China has led to a growing number of people accessing Religious Studies websites; Christian, Jewish and scholarly sites. Chinese university registration with online scholarly resources has also contributed to the accelerated exposure of scholars to disciplines previously not accessible. A majority of the people I have spoken with who became devotees of Judaism and Jewish Studies acquired their information and their faith through Jewish-based websites. A growing number of Chinese-language websites on the Bible and Jewish Studies has accelerated this trend somewhat, although there remains much to do in this area.<sup>54</sup> One website in particular (<http://www.jewcn.com>) is dedicated to Israeli and Jewish history and culture; it contains thousands of pages and is run by Hu Liangming, a devotee, lover and scholar of Israel. Hu has collected an impressive personal library of Chinese works on Israel and the Jewish people; and, even though without any formal sanction, without any income or profit, he continues to provide the most updated and informed website in the Chinese language about Israel.

Blogging has become a contagious medium for expression of religious interests, and groups with shared interest in Jewish and religious studies are taking full advantage of it. Where this blogging will ultimately lead cannot be fully understood yet, but it has ushered in a new and valuable tool for Jewish Studies, passionate discussion and debate, and the formation of networks throughout Mainland China, Hong Kong and Singapore.

### **Genocide Studies**

The subject of comparative Jewish and Chinese suffering and genocide studies has interesting and fertile areas of mutual study and collaboration. It can extend into the fields of comparative historical memory, rites for mourning, commemoration, ritual and education.

The sense of affinity Chinese share with Jews on the subject of mutual suffering is evident at universities and colleges around China where students

are quick to associate Jews with the tragedies during World War II and to recognize the tragedy of the victims of the Nazis.

They are also as quick to equate the history of Chinese suffering with Jewish suffering. I have often heard Chinese students equate the Nanjing Massacre to the Holocaust. I have also put forward my view that this is not correct and, though comparing atrocities is hardly an empirical science, argued that the Holocaust was unique in its diabolism. The attempt to put Chinese suffering in general and the Nanjing Massacre in particular on the same level of suffering and cruelty as Jewish suffering has its roots in complex questions of nationalism and identity, beyond the scope of this work.

It has been estimated that the various Chinese editions of *The Diary of Anne Frank* translated in the 1970s sold approximately 40 million copies in China.<sup>55</sup> There is deep interest and empathy in the subject of humiliation, and the Jews are respected because they surmounted tragedy. The horrors of the Holocaust and the experience of Anne Frank served as a universal motif for the starved Chinese, who were just emerging from the trauma of a century of war, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution.<sup>56</sup>

It is evident that educated Chinese know about the Holocaust, and many feel great sympathy for the Jews. Chinese are characterized as a “people of the heart”, and the tragedy of the Holocaust, the pictures and undeniable cruelty on a scale that few could imagine have touched many and brought great sympathy for the Jewish people.

Professor Zhang Qianhong, a scholar of Genocide and Holocaust Studies at Henan University in Kaifeng, together with Jerry Gotel, who teaches Holocaust Studies at the same university, noted in a co-authored article that Chinese, in contrast to the detailed commemorative ritual characteristic of Jews, have, to a large degree, shied away from the commemoration of their tragedies owing to the shame and loss of face associated with it, and the desire to forget it rather than undergo a “second humiliation”.<sup>57</sup>

Perhaps the broad empathy for Jewish suffering provides a vehicle for Chinese to understand their own, often repressed, frustration at the violations they experienced. As noted elsewhere in this book, Chinese also commonly express great interest and delight in the economic success and prowess of modern Jews, demonstrating Jewish facility to transcend tragedy. Perhaps living vicariously, Chinese hope that they, too, can achieve prominence despite their own historical tragedies, and Jewish Studies is a vehicle for doing this.

Though late in coming, over the last decade the pace of Chinese national commemoration and investigation has accelerated. As Chinese become increasingly proud of their economic achievements they are becoming increasingly indignant at their humiliations, and memory is being ritualized in various ways. Exchanges of scholars, publishing of articles and the convening of conferences are endorsed on every level of academia and scholarship. Genocide Studies is supported by many levels of national and provincial government agencies, by educational and commemorative funds, universities and research institutions, and fueled by a variety of personal, national and

strategic interests to remember and commemorate. A significant number of scholars and officials who either research or are commissioned with duties relating to the commemoration of Chinese suffering are likely to encounter Jewish- and Holocaust-related studies of direct relevance.

As Chinese officialdom realizes the historical necessity to commemorate and educate future generations about Chinese suffering, they seek models. Recently, for example, Nanjing's local government decided to expand the scale of the existing Nanjing Memorial Hall and build a World Peace Square. In 2007, by chance, I met a number of Chinese officials involved in the planning of this project on an El Al flight to Israel; they were going to attend seminars in Holocaust commemoration and to study Jewish techniques at preserving historical memory. This trend is continually expanding and falls into an area of politically correct and legitimate dialogue on mutual interests. Increasing numbers of Chinese scholars, students and officials have become more profoundly exposed to the horrors of the Holocaust as well as to the efforts of Jews to commemorate tragedy and ensure it can never happen again. In this way many Chinese involved in the subject are drawn into a further understanding of its significance, a great compassion for Jews, and also empathy with the role of the state of Israel in ensuring Jewish survival.

Professor Zhong Zhiqing of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences started her career in Hebrew literature and came to focus on the way Israeli writers rethink and reconstruct the traumatic experience of World War II and how modern Hebrew literature remakes national memory in literary form.<sup>58</sup> She has since compared the techniques of Chinese and Israelis in their contemplation of the humiliations and disasters of war.

In an insightful dialogue with Shimon Peres, a senior Communist Party official responsible for promoting Jewish cultural studies and relations with the Jewish people describes how the Jewish experience in preserving memory was valuable to China.<sup>59</sup>

*Shimon Peres:* "China is the role model for national development. China's achievement made it a real superpower. . . . China did not rely on any other country's aid, but cultivated its domestic potential on its own. China took a different road if compared with other countries. Simultaneously, it did not let other countries pay for their success."

*Zhao Qizheng:* "The Jewish people did a serious and immediate investigation after WWII over the catastrophe they experienced during the war, and collected the historical material. They expressed themselves in an appropriate way to the world. So China has a lot to learn from Israel in this way, to learn the experiences that Israelis have. . . . When I go home after this visit, I will encourage the heads of some important museums in China to go to the kibbutz museum that I've been to and get trained there. They should understand by the study that the task of the museum is not only to exhibit the annals, but also, by the exhibition, to inspire and touch the soul . . . when I visit different countries in

the world I go to museums in New York and Washington DC . . . and now I have the chance to see the Israeli Holocaust Museum . . . during the visit, many Israeli friends said to me that the commitment of our generation is to run museums well. We cannot leave it to the next generation; otherwise people will have vaguer ideas about the war in the past and the persecution it brought them. The memory will be cut off. . . . History is a good teacher. But false and distorted history is a bad one.

In comparative studies Chinese learn that they were not the only people humiliated in war. The Japanese were not the only enemy incarnate, and others have suffered equal or greater losses. Genocide Studies demonstrates the variety of ways and motifs for grieving, and furnishes a number of alternative responses to humiliation and suffering which do not have to lead to isolation, or to forms of compensating nationalism or to obsessing on “second humiliations”. This particular discipline touches one of the most sensitive nerves of Chinese identity and pride, and sharing this with Jewish scholars opens opportunities to deal with issues of fundamental national feeling. The foundations for further discourse and exchange have been laid. As long as there is memory of these events in Chinese history, the study of the Holocaust will also invariably be referred to. Just as Holocaust Remembrance Day has become a day dedicated to remembering genocide in all its forms around the world, the Nanjing Massacre may become for Chinese a lesson and memory of universal suffering.

### **Institutions and departments**

Presently there are about fifteen to twenty universities in China that offer courses in some areas of Jewish Studies. Saloman Wald estimated in 2004 that “fewer than twenty Chinese scholars devote themselves full time to Judaic studies, alongside thirty to forty graduate students. There are maybe up to two hundred scholars who are involved in Jewish studies on a part time basis. . . .”<sup>60</sup> The numbers are already significantly higher. As PhD students graduate, it is necessary for them to find placements within existing academic frameworks; it will be their success in integrating within other departments that will define their success and the continual growth of Jewish Studies units.

The various centers of Jewish Studies and their members compete with each other to be perceived as the most legitimate. Scholars are often antagonistic towards each other, and not insignificant political backstabbing is known to occur. The issues which are most important for these centers and critical for their objective and self-ranking are based on the following criteria:

- Status and degree of recognition by the government and other authorities
- Status as an advisory body for government policy
- Success vis-à-vis grant-funding authorities

- Numbers and quality of the foreign guests it hosts
- Influence of its publications on academics and teachers
- Number of postgraduate students it is permitted to accept into accredited degree courses
- Numbers of employees
- Perception of its leaders as scholars by the media as well as by the general public
- Academic authority of its leaders amongst other scholars.

As noted above, Professor Xu Xin was one of the pioneers of Jewish Studies who introduced Jewish Studies courses at Nanjing University within the School of Foreign Languages and Literature as an introduction to American Jewish writers. In the 1990s he was finally able to set up a research unit/center at Nanjing University offering broader courses to other students. He raised money from visiting Jewish tourists and drew attention to Chinese–Jewish relations. In light of the above thesis that Jewish Studies was in the process of being condoned by the national authorities, Xu Xin's timing in lobbying on behalf of Jewish Studies was impeccable. His skill in navigating and understanding the limits of government controls and advancing his passion for the subject, unaware that there was tacit approval for it, and his pursuit of Jewish Studies on his own volition, not under instruction from seniors, are to his credit.

Peking University's School of Foreign Languages awards a BA degree in Hebrew Language and Literature with about eight to fourteen students starting the course every four years. Until recently, some of the language teachers were brought from Israel. In recent years, however, several MA and PhD students were sent to universities in Israel to be primed to teach the course themselves.

Chen Yiyi, a graduate from this Hebrew program in the early 1990s, went on to a doctorate at Cornell University in Near Eastern Studies, Biblical Studies and Northwest Semitics, and subsequently took up a position as an associate professor at the department of Oriental Studies at Peking University, initiating seminars and conferences on biblical, Jewish and Ancient Near East related subjects.

The Social Science Academy of Shanghai runs a Center for Jewish and Israeli Studies under Professor Pan Guang, with some permanent scholars and approximately fifteen postgraduate students researching primarily on modern Jewish and Middle Eastern politics, the Arab–Israeli conflict, and some areas of modern Jewish, mainly political and social thought. Many Jewish tourists and VIPs, including rabbis, academics, prime ministers, presidents and magnates visiting Shanghai, have made their way to this center to discuss Jewish-related themes with its leaders and scholars. As a result, the center began publishing albums and books relating to the Jewish communities of China (Shanghai, Harbin, Tianjin and a briefer work on Kaifeng) which received an enthusiastic reception. The center attracts senior Chinese advisors and officials for introductions with visiting dignitaries, which has bolstered its role and reputation. Established in 1988, it served as the gateway for foreign visitors



to understand Chinese academia and Chinese relations with Jews and Jewish Studies. It still claims to be “the most influential research institution in China on Jewish and Israel studies”; and, although this may be true in so far as it interacts with foreigners, its academic output and publishing capabilities are limited to the small number of doctoral and research fellows permitted to work at the center.

The University of Henan in Kaifeng has a course in Holocaust Studies with lectures in general Jewish history run by Professor Zhang Qianhong. Henan University’s Institute of Biblical Literature has two or three Master’s students studying biblical literature each year who pay great attention to Hebrew culture under the influence of their supervisor Liang Gong, the Dean of the Institute. Being in the city of Kaifeng has an attraction and potential to pursue Kaifeng Jewish studies, but the scholars and students keep as far away from the topic as possible, under pressure from various government authorities.

Professor Fu Xiaowei has started a unit at Sichuan International Studies University in Chongqing through which she aims to offer lectures on Jewish writers to graduate students, to invite students interested in Jewish culture to work with her researching projects such as “Confusion in Jewish Literary Translation in China” and “Jewish Literary Translation and Its Influence on Contemporary China”, to proffer support and guidance to scholars of foreign languages and literature not majoring in Judaic study (the study of the Jewish mystical elements in Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin’s thoughts), and to guide graduate students in a new discipline of American Jewish Culture.

Her work is important primarily because it draws attention to the mistakes being made in the rapid translation programs being undertaken. If the mistakes are not fixed in the coming decades, it is all the more necessary to ensure that the translators become aware of the major problems and pitfalls. The sooner the translation process develops a methodology, systemizes Jewish-related terms, and makes distinctions between the Christian interpretation and the Jewish interpretation of terminology, the sooner teachers can become more familiar with accurate Jewish concepts and impart them in a continuing process.

Yunnan University’s Department of International Relations under Professor Xiao Xian also runs courses in Jewish Studies. In 2005 they hosted a conference entitled “Israel and Diaspora Judaism”. Other universities with courses in Judaism include the University of Heilongjiang in Harbin, where, as earlier mentioned, efforts to cooperate with the former Jewish residents of the city have stimulated a Jewish Studies unit and a biannual conference. There are other provincial universities and Christian religious seminaries that teach courses in Jewish Bible and Biblical Hebrew. Nankai University’s School of Literature has a major of Comparative Literature and World Literature established by Zhu Weizhi. Each year it enrolls one or two Master’s and doctoral students specializing in Biblical Literature and Culture under the supervision of Professor Wang Lixin. Shenzhen University’s Institute of Comparative Literature teaches Jewish religious culture and literature where Professor Liu Hongyi plays an important role.

There are also several Christian theological colleges, of different denominational persuasions, that teach Hebrew and Hebrew Bible, including Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, a training college for future Protestant clergy, with an estimated hundred students, who have studied Hebrew.<sup>61</sup> I have had priests and ministers from Dalian, Jinan, Guangzhou and Qingdao who have interests in pursuing Jewish Studies contact me or come to my classes.

At the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences of Beijing there are several institutes that pay attention to Jewish political, religious and literature issues: for example, the Institute of West Asian and African Studies, the Institute of World Religion, and the Institute of Foreign Literature. Some scholars of these institutes, such as Yin Gang and Zhong Zhiqing, play an important role in introducing Jewish religion, culture and literature to Chinese, and promoting a mutual understanding of Chinese and Jewish cultures with publications, blogs, forums and academic activities. The Institute of Middle Eastern Studies of Northwest University also permits Jewish Studies especially as it relates to the Arabic world.

There is also interest being shown in Jewish literature, particularly in American Jewish literature, in some schools of foreign languages and literature in Chinese universities, such as at Xiamen University and Shandong University where some Master's and doctoral students write theses or dissertations on American Jewish writers like Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud and Philip Roth. In addition, the English Department of Beijing Foreign Studies University, led by Professor Qian Qing, and Shanghai International Studies University, under Professor Qiao Guoqiang, offer Jewish literature courses. Some departments of history also get involved in Jewish Studies: for example, Shanghai University, with Professor Guo Changgang, and Ludong University, under Professor Zhang Shuqing.

Several PhD students are undertaking research at the élite Communist Party School in Beijing (Zhongyang Dangxiao) on Jewish-related subjects. These subjects include Leo Strauss, the Jewish Neo-Conservative Movement, and the Jewish lobby (AIPAC) in the United States. Two doctoral graduates from Shandong University's Department of Philosophy, under Fu Youde, took up positions teaching at the Party School, bringing into the most important academy for the training of China's future senior leadership an interest in and sensitivity to Jewish-related themes. I, too, have taught a number of students who have continued further study at Zhongyang Dangxiao. The availability of Jewish Studies in university departments around China will invariably have a ripple effect as graduates find their way to policy-making instrumentalities and to positions of greater influence.

### **The Center for Judaic and Inter-Religious Studies at Shandong University**

In 1993, after returning from a period of research at Oxford University and at the Leo Baeck Institute in London, Professor Fu Youde decided that it was necessary to introduce Jewish philosophy as an academic discipline within

the ranks of Chinese academia. In January 1994 he set up the Judaic Center at Shandong University. Becoming dean of the Department of Philosophy and the School of Religion, his ability to incorporate Jewish Studies into the curriculum was enhanced. As he became increasingly recognized for his philosophic writings as well as for his work in Jewish philosophy, in 2003 he orchestrated formal recognition for the institute from the national authorities and renamed it the Center for Judaic and Inter-Religious Studies. His laborious efforts to secure funding from central government finally paid off, and in 2004 the center was conferred with the status of a Key Research Institute in the Humanities and Social Sciences, representing a prestigious and extraordinary achievement for the development of Jewish Studies in China.

Apart from being a highly distinguished status conferred on only a hundred units across the entire academia of China, it endows Jewish Studies with the status of an independent discipline, worthy of respect in the pantheon of academic disciplines competing for attention in China. Cross-fertilization with other disciplines was only a matter of time. Importantly, the recognition came with national funding. Together with a contribution from Shandong University, the budget amounted to RMB2,400,000 (US\$342,000), and a further RMB360,000 (US\$52,000) was raised from funding from abroad for a five-year period with an option for more funding after the demonstration of achievements.

This development represents a watershed for Jewish Studies in China. Central government recognition of the legitimacy and value of Jewish philosophy to the Chinese people was on the table; few knew how the “promise” of central government officials would be fulfilled, and it seemed that it was coming to fruition. The Center became one of only three key research institutes in China permitted to engage in research, publications and scholarship in the broad area of Religious Studies. The case of legalization of Judaism had not yet been addressed *per se*, but no doubt the scholars who were in a position to discuss and proffer advice on these matters were in the process of formulating a case.

This national status paved the way for the Center for Judaic and Inter Religious Studies to become one of the leading schools of Religious Studies in China. It was permitted to take on larger numbers of Master’s and doctoral students so as to increase its scholarly output, to diversify its range of studies beyond philosophy and sociology, jointly to issue doctoral degrees to attract better and more productive students, to convene conferences and summer schools, to build large archives, and to publish journals and books on the subject of Jewish and religious studies.

Besides undertaking research work, the Center also engaged in teaching. In the year 2000, Shandong University was qualified by the Ministry of Education to teach Religious Studies as a major to graduate and postgraduate students. This is an unusual distinction as the study of religion is considered sensitive and as such it is strictly controlled by the national authorities. In 2001 the Center began to enroll BA and MA students, and doctoral

candidates cooperating in accrediting units towards doctoral degrees in Chinese Philosophy and Foreign Philosophy. In 2005 the Center was granted the authority to award PhD degrees; and in 2006 it started enrollment of its own PhD candidates. Since 1994 sixty-five MA graduates have been cultivated by the Center.

Institutional recognition is of critical importance in Chinese academia. Winning the authority to grant degrees requires a long, complicated and rigorous process of scrutiny by higher-education officials. Degree-holders can take up senior public positions, and attract higher wages and benefits. Issuers of degrees wield power over students and researchers who are virtually indentured to the institute for long periods of time, paid very low wages, expected to work very hard and to assist their academic supervisors in any work they require. The benefits to a degree issuer are great, and the scholarly output benefiting from this authority is substantial.

The Center aspired to be a leader of Jewish research in Asia and to develop new avenues of Jewish scholarship as it pertains to China. Many eminent scholars from around the world were invited to participate in its projects. The aim was to develop an international atmosphere; nurture exchange of interests and expertise in Judaism; develop inter-religious studies in general; synthesize with Chinese religions such as Confucianism, Buddhism or Daoism as well as with Marxism and Chinese political thought.

The major researchers of the Center include leading professors in the field from around China: Fu Youde, Avrum Ehrlich, Liu Jie, Fu Yongjun, Cai Degui, Xie Wenyu, He Zhonghua, Liu Xinli, Huang Fuwu, Chen Jian, Niu Jianke, Zhao Jie, Liu Ping, Sun Zenglin, Shen Shunfu, Guo Peng, Huang Qixiang, Liu Tianlu, Hu Weiqing and Wang Lili. Other prestigious institutions and universities with academics involved in Jewish-related fields, including the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Peking University, Renmin University, Zhejiang University, Fudan University, Wuhan University and Nanjing University, have part-time association with the Center.

Professor Fu Youde drew leading academics from around China and the world into cooperation with the Center, thereby endowing it with recognition within the broader studies of Chinese social sciences, collaborating between fields and other disciplines. These included Professor Niu Jianke, Professor Zhao Dunhua, Dean of the Department of Philosophy at Peking University, Professor Fang Litian from Renmin University, Professor Lai Yonghai from Nanjing University, and Professor Steven Katz from Boston University. There are seventeen full-time researchers in the Center, including twelve professors and five associate professors. Ten of them have the rank of PhD supervisors, and eleven are researchers with PhD degrees. There are thirteen part-time research associates who are professors and PhD supervisors, five from Shandong University, eight from other universities, including from the United Kingdom and Hong Kong. Most of the research associates have studied or researched abroad, and have familiarity with the language of their host country. This, too, is an important consideration of university officials

with policies that require terms abroad to develop proficiency and experience. For example, there exist a number of state-initiated projects: “myriads of talent project” and the “academic excellence and talent for the new century” project, sponsored by the Ministry of Education, which are intended to encourage outstanding young teachers and researchers. The Center has brought many recipients of these awards into its ranks.

In the course of these developments, I was also appointed a full professor, with duties including teaching Hebrew Bible, Talmudic thought, Jewish classics, Kabbalah and Hasidism, as well as supervising Master’s and PhD students and assisting with the development of curriculum and projects. In the course of this period I completed the editing of the *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora* (ABC CLIO, 2008), two books on Judaism and other religions in China, and several articles. I was also able to begin a synthesis of Chinese thought from my own roots in Jewish thinking.

In addition to the emphasis on Judaic Studies, religion and philosophy, the Center managed to broaden its research fields into areas such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Bahai and more, and to this end engaged appropriate professional research members in inter-religion studies. This had the effect of bringing together the leading Chinese scholars of world religions and facilitating their exposure to Jewish themes. The Center is comprised of several departments, the main being the Institute of Jewish Studies; the others include: the Institute of Christian Studies, the Institute of Buddhist Studies, the Institute of Religious Philosophy, the Institute of Japanese and Indian Religions and the Institute for Bahai Studies. In recent years, the Center has established steady relations with many international research institutions including Israel’s Hebrew University and Bar Ilan University, Boston University in the United States, the University of Sydney and Mandelbaum House in Australia, the Department of Religion at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies.

Since 2001 more than fifty scholars have had periods, short to long, at the Center to teach and research. They include: Richard Swinburne of Cambridge University, American theologian Mel Stewart, Jonathan Magonet of London, Wen Weiyao from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, Yang Fenggang, a scholar majoring in Sociology of Religion in Purdue University in the United States, Jay Harris, Dean of the Center for Judaic Studies in Harvard University, Sylvia Barak Fishman of Brandeis University, Elliot Wolfson, leading American scholar of Jewish mysticism from New York University, Yom Tov Assis from Hebrew University in Jerusalem, Haim Rabinowitch, Rector of Hebrew University, and many more. The Center has hosted visiting Jewish and Israeli groups of tourists and students, including a delegation from the Inter-Disciplinary Center in Herzliya and from the University of Connecticut and Hebrew Union College.

The Center has organized and participated in several international academic conferences. In 2001, to celebrate the centenary of Shandong University, the Center sponsored the Seventh Sino-American Symposium on Philosophy and

Religion; in 2002, together with Shandong University's Institute of European Studies, it hosted an International Symposium on Israel; also a Symposium of *Qiu Chuji* Studies; two years later an International Symposium on Jewish Culture; in 2005 it held an International Symposium on Inter-Religious Dialogue: Confucianism, Judaism and Christianity; in 2006 a symposium was held on Chinese and Christian Ethics. Besides hosting all these conferences, it also sent more than twenty researchers to attend symposiums in other countries and areas, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Israel, Turkey, South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The Center's publication and research record puts it well in front of any other research institute in Judaism and religion in China. During the last ten years, the Center has published 440 academic papers, and about 100 academic books, among which the following are most characteristic of the Center:

Translations into Chinese published by Shandong University Publishing House, including: *Judaism on Trial*; *Modern Jewish Religious Movements: The Guide for the Perplexed*; *Everyman's Talmud*; *A Short History of the Jewish People*; *On Judaism*; *On the Essence of Judaism*; *Judaism as a Civilization*; *God in Search of Man*; *Star of Redemption*; *Spinoza*; *Cultural History of the Holy Roman Empire (1648–1806)*; *Timaeus*; *Religions and the Japanese Society*.

Current translation processes include: *The Mishnah*; *The Zohar* (abridged); *Maimonides*; *Book of Knowledge*; *Religion of Reason*.

Books written by scholars of the Center include: *Modern Jewish Philosophy*; *Jewish Celebrities: Famous Thinkers*; *The Concept of Freedom: The Platonic–Augustinian–Lutheran–Kierkegaardian Tradition*; *Non-Sensuous Perception and Its Philosophical Significance*; *Relevance and Relationships*; *China and the West: Inter-Religious Dialogues*; *Studies on Modern Islamic Philosophy*; *Guide to the Study of Religion*; *Studies on Modern Bahai Faith*; *Christianity and Western Culture*; *Christianity and the German Nation*; *Affliction Is Bodhi*; *Studies on the Philosophy of Japanese Back-to-Ancient Shinto*. Current research projects include: *Jewish philosophy studies* (National Social Science Funded Program); *Translation of Series of Masterpieces in Judaic Culture* (Ministry of Education Project of Key Research Institutes in the Humanities and Social Sciences at Universities); *History of Judaism* (Ministry of Education Project of Key Research Institutes in the Humanities and Social Sciences at Universities); *Comparative study of dialogue among religions* (Ministry of Education Project of Key Research Institutes in the Humanities and Social Sciences at Universities); *Studies on anti-Semitism* (Ministry of Education Project of Key Research Institutes in the Humanities and Social Sciences at Universities); *Comparison and dialogue among religions* (Key Project of Shandong Province); *Studies on the relationships between philosophy and religion* (National 985 Project); *Studies on the relationships between world religions* (National 985 Project); *Christianity and the nature of German culture* (Project of “the Tenth Five-Year Plan” of Social Sciences).

The Center supported and coordinated the writing of a multivolume history of Judaism as well as a work on anti-Semitism past and present.



In 2002 the Center set up the *Journal of Jewish Studies*, the only academic journal in China to specialize in Jewish Studies. This journal accepts papers on Judaic religion and philosophy, history and culture, ethics and law, literature and art, ideology and politics, folklore and customs, relationships between Judaism and other religions, and relationships between Judaism and other cultures. So far, six issues have been published.

The Center has a 252 square meter library housing about 60,000 academic books on general religious topics, and about a hundred journal and magazine subscriptions in Chinese, English and other languages. Over the last several years the library has built its Jewish book collections through book exchanges with university libraries around the world, most notably with the University of Texas via its Judaica librarian Nathan Snyder, also with the National Library in Jerusalem, Bar Ilan University library, the University of Boston and Hebrew Union College libraries. The Center has received donations of books from other Jewish organizations and individuals including the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies in Australia. Rabbi Marvin Tokayer, a regular visitor to China, was active in collecting books for the library. Noam Urbach, then a PhD candidate at Haifa University, spent two years in Jinan coordinating the collection process while instructing in Hebrew language. Starting from virtually nothing, the Judaica library has already become a significant collection by Chinese standards. Its long-term goal is to become the most comprehensive Judaica collection in China and serve as a resource center providing loan and copy services to other centers and departments of Jewish Studies in China.

Over the next few years, the main activities of the Center will focus on continuing the translation and publication of the *Masterpieces of Judaic Culture Series*; increasing the volume of monographs in Chinese from ten to twenty books; continuing to hold annual symposiums and summer schools; completing the first two-volume work on Jewish history and an *Introduction to Judaism* volume; building a national information center for Judaic cultural studies; building a Jewish scholarship library and archives; improving the quality of Judaic Studies amongst its students and fostering knowledge of Jewish Studies in China; developing its reputation as the leading center of Jewish Studies in China and Asia; developing international programs and exchanges including international diplomas, Master's and PhD programs undertaken at the center, and continuing to attract high-ranking scholars to visit and lecture at Shandong University.

### **Jewish Studies and its relevance to China**

The versatility of the Jewish experience is probably one of the attractive qualities for Chinese scholars. Judaism has demonstrated its ability to be transfigured and used in other national contexts, and referenced for a plethora of ideologies. The ease with which Chinese scholars mine and apply valuable references from within the body of Jewish Studies to their own contexts is



evidence of its trans-contextual durability. In the Bibliography I provide a comprehensive survey of books and articles either written or translated into Chinese, indicating the diversity of subjects that scholars and popular writers extract from the Jewish experience.

Unlike Christianity or Islam, which place theology at the center of their religious life, Judaism spans a broader inter-disciplinary spectrum including: theology and religious debate; legal interpretation, methodology and logic; philosophies and inter-cultural dialectics; interpretive traditions; eclectic archives of historical data, records, biographies and stories; moral, ethical, spiritual, mystical texts and treatises; strategies for confronting crisis, change and modernity; political traditions; rational traditions. The list goes on *ad infinitum*.

Judaism has had dialogue with many ideologies and phenomena throughout history: with most of the great nations of the world; with many religions, some extinct, others still extant; with revolutionary, reform and utopian movements; with aggressors and oppressors; with political, social and economic currents; with allies and opponents. Its assiduous recording and interpretation of events through history, biographies, prayers, poetry, theology and law brings a perspective that the study of other mediums does less satisfactorily. The dialogue and exchange that Jewish culture can have with China is not limited to a discourse on religion, but extends to political discourse, social theory, crisis of tradition and modernity, issues of national survival and identity. Judaism, which arguably promoted secularism as a framework for its own survival, can engage in dialogue with atheism and secularism from deep within its cultural consciousness. In addition, Jewish elements have applicable exchange with Chinese ethical and religious traditions from Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, and so Judaism's applicability within a Chinese context is multifarious.

For China, which still considers itself developing, the luxury of investing its academic efforts in studying facets of international culture and history, without extracting the most salient points for national advancement, is a diversion of limited funds and valuable human intellectual resources that are needed for national reconstruction. The designation of primary fields of study by university and higher education policy is done so as to maximize intellectual productivity. Jewish Studies so it is argued by those who promote it provides a continuous summary and overview of many salient features of other nations' ideas and cultural structures. The accompaniment and participation of Judaism in many of the major phenomena and events of interest in ancient and modern history renders it an irreplaceable repository of information and a reference to other national histories and cultural evolutions. Its study affords a historical, intellectual and scientific *tour de force* of major trends in world history.

There have been two types of socio-intellectual worldviews advocated by Jews: those relating to their own existence as Jews – for example, religious and legal teachings and interpretations – the second is Jews (even though

they may not strongly identify) who put forward ideas of general universal application valuable to other civilizations. While it is likely that many of these ideas have been inspired by the Jewish experience, none the less they are not deemed to be Jewish, and their fundamental premise not attributed from within Judaism. Examples of the first are Jesus, Maimonides, Buber and their thoughts on God, human dignity, law and social justice. Examples of the latter are the intellectual contributions of Freud, Einstein and Marx. While both types may be instructive to China and from the perspective of Chinese, both constitute the corpus of Jewish creative productivity; none the less it is to the latter type that China's deepest curiosity is drawn.

### **Existing applications**

In the Bibliography I present a comprehensive list of books and articles on Jewish Studies to demonstrate the range of subjects that Chinese academics and writers deal with. From the list of topics one observes the relative superficiality of analysis and the immaturity of the subject, a relative lack of academic rigor, and a preoccupation with applications of Jewish Studies within Chinese circumstances instead of focus on the material *per se*. These criticisms are discussed in more detail below.

### **Students' impressions of Jewish Studies**

At the beginning of every semester I have conducted a survey of my students' impressions of Judaism. At that stage they have no background or any scholarly knowledge beyond their own readings. I questioned their basic impressions of Jews and Judaism, presented in more detail in another chapter. At the conclusion of the first semester, I asked them a second time for their impressions of Jews and Judaism to identify how their impressions had changed. The following are some of the responses:

The Jews are very strict with themselves. Judaism teaches that they should love others like themselves and so are strict with others too. For the Chinese Christian the bible is their faith book. It is very important to every aspect of their lives. To other Chinese people it is a way to learn another culture and maybe it can improve communication between Chinese and other cultures and maybe help Chinese understand better their own national culture.

Jews are strict with discipline.

I know little about Jews only they are clever and good at business. They require strictness, love humanity and God.

Their religion seemed very mysterious to me at first. I discovered they are very strict in their treatment of scriptures such as the Old Testament. We were taught they are elected by God and different from other people. I think it is interesting and worth comparing with the Chinese.

I believe the difference between Jews and Christianity is their principles, the law.

Chinese and Jews are so different. Most people in China have never read the bible, but they do know there is a God in the western world. But there is no relationship between the bible and their life. Nowadays we can know each other's culture better.

Jews think there is a God who commands them in the bible.

Before starting this class I knew nothing about Judaism, I didn't even know the Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew. The only thing I knew was that Jews were intelligent people. It is commonly known in the world that the Jews are one of the smartest nations. I think there must be a relationship between China and Jews as both have a long history, both have suffered. The Jews bible has made a difference to the world just like Chinese culture has influenced many countries. In Genesis, there are descriptions of how God created human beings. The way he created man is similar to Chinese tradition. Humans, in the bible and in Chinese tradition, were made from dust. We came from the ground and we return to the dust. But there are also significant differences in our thinking. What impressed me most is the importance of the law in the Jewish people's mind. The law allows for equality. There is one God upon whom the law is based. The example of an eye for an eye a tooth for a tooth reflecting equality could not happen in China. If the eye of an important dignitary was plucked, he would not take your eye, but destroy your family and your relatives and call for harsher punishment. There is no law for the king or powerful people in China. In Chinese tradition the king is the son of the sky (the sky is the Chinese God) so whatever the king said is the law. There is no equality in ancient China. I think that these differences happened because of the different ways that Chinese and Jewish people were created according to their traditions. God created man in his image and formed him from his bones. But NuWa, the Goddess who created man in China, created man by dropping mud dots to the ground from the sky. In this way Chinese are not as precious as Jewish people to the creator, who did not give us as much attention.

These students responded somewhat differently after a semester of study in the Jewish/religion program. I requested and insisted they be critical if they wished to and not hold back their thoughts out of courtesy to me as their teacher.

In class I changed my view about God. Once I thought that God was strict, no humans could touch him and even though I don't believe in it, I discovered the God is the source of human love.

The most important idea in Judaism is the belief in one God and that people are equal before God.

On further study I discovered the bible is not a simple book as I imagined but contains philosophy and wisdom of life. The most vivid example is the story of creation of the world. It sounds very sensible that ancient Jews understood rest is necessary, even for God. So they made the rule that everyone, even God, stops working on the 7th day. It influenced the entire world even those who don't believe in God.

When God created man he said "make man in our image after our likeness", I think not only humans look like God but also should behave like God and do what God outlines. This is an important principle and Judaism follows these principles.

Regarding the story of the tree of life good and bad, a long time ago when I was a child and heard this story I thought God was selfish and cheated man, because he wanted to be the only intelligent being. But now I have a different opinion. God said to Eve "the day you eat of it you will surely die", God didn't say you will die immediately but definitely. She lived until 930 years old. Maybe if she hadn't eaten it she never would have died. Perhaps being wise is not so good; we have a saying in China, wise people do bad things because they are too wise. Sometimes clever people will do more folly than a fool. A stupid person is happy everyday and a wise person always worries. If Eve didn't eat she may never have worried, it is like the Daoist religion, Master LaoZi advocated simple and creative quietude.

Nowadays more and more Chinese believe in God. People feel hollow with the developments of the economy and technology. The bible can calm them and relax their dissatisfaction and help them adjust. Because there is no religion in China the subject is complex.

I think that Jewish Studies is not important for general Chinese but are important for religious studies students. China is a developing country and needs to pay attention to its economy over people's spirits. There are not many people that care about the spirit. The most important aspect of biblical studies is the difference of thinking. We both have a long history and both nations are smart so learning different styles of thinking is meaningful.

The issue I'm most interested in is man's role in the world. Jews believe that man is special; Jews are special because God chose them to be his slaves. They are proud of this. They believe man is like a keeper of the world, that God created it and made man its keeper so that man must manage the animals and plants and the environment. This is so different from our Chinese way. Our tradition tells us that man is master of all. We can rise to heaven to be a holy person, we could also descend to evil. It all depends on our will and action.

I believe that studying Judaism is important. We should see how other people live their lives, their beliefs, and their way of thinking. It is important to know how Jews live and that the center of their existence

is the bible. I would be interested to understand more about their culture and rituals.

The bible helps us be concerned with ourselves and helps us love others too and help make our society more harmonious.

I don't think the study of the bible is too important; the most important thing is to study traditional Chinese culture.

The most interesting issue in the Hebrew bible is the creation of the world.

We all know world culture is multicultural, the pivotal way to develop our culture is not to close or seal up, but to exchange. The thoughts and ideas in the bible are important.

I think God teaches us to love, that is the most important point.

The bible plays an important part in China because more and more people begin to believe in Christianity. There are many ethical knowledge [sic] and commands in the bible which can help human beings to live in harmony.

It is important for us to learn about different kinds of religion.

I heard a lot of stories about Jews and Judaism; I'm not interested in the subject. I was interested in why humans were created and don't think it was necessary. I don't think bible or Judaism is important or useful for Chinese, no people use it.

I don't think that Jewish or Hebrew bible is important to learn in China. We may learn about the spirit and culture of Jews but religion is different everywhere, we have our own beliefs. The most important is to learn our beliefs which we gave up for nearly 100 years.

The bible may have some morals.

God is everything for them and they believe what God says is right.

Most interesting is the idea of separation, to be loyal to tradition, culture and belief. I think four words are important: faith, culture, people and ceremony.

My many friends thought the Judean nationality is very mystical, I thought that if I study this I can also have some mystical colors, so I think Jewish culture is very interesting.

### **Areas of potential Jewish–Chinese intellectual synergy**

One of the first questions a Jewish scholar is likely to ask himself/herself on coming to China to teach is how their field can be useful within a Chinese context. How can it advance Chinese interests, and can their time and energies be justified? How can the wisdom they teach be fused and/or reconciled in a mutually complementary way with the Chinese experience? This question comes naturally within the construct of Jewish pedagogy, especially as the teaching of Judaism outside the Jewish community is an unusual and recent phenomenon, doing so often requiring self-justification, and explanations to peers, friends and family.

To address these questions, a second set of questions needs to be addressed. Is Jewish Studies just another minor academic pursuit in China, reserved for a few experts and postgraduate students at higher education levels, or is it a subject of broad scope and popular relevance? Is Jewish Studies more instructive than, let's say, Greco-Roman, Ottoman, or American Studies? Is the study of Hebrew different from that of Ugarit or Cuneiform? Does Jewish religious thinking contain more instructive insight for the socialist-atheist Chinese scholar than Islam and/or Christianity? Is Jewish history more relevant to the Chinese than Spanish or Dutch history? Is Judaism's educational, spiritual, intellectual or cultural contribution unique, and does it deserve special attention, to be prioritized above other subjects taught at Chinese universities? Is the study of Judaism an unnecessary luxury for a developing country like China or is it especially useful in redressing China's unique challenges?

My conviction on this subject, born of a number of different considerations, is that Jewish civilization is not just one of the many subjects and cultures useful in broadening China's horizons, but is unique and especially helpful for the specific conditions in which China finds itself. Much of this has been argued above; in the following paragraphs I shall specifically argue how and why I believe this is so, and how Jewish scholars and the study of Judaism and specific works can serve an invaluable and instructive role in Chinese nation-building as well as in China's cultural and intellectual endeavors, beyond the usefulness of other intellectual and cultural vehicles.

### **The value of the Hebrew Bible to China**

In October 2004 the *Shanghai Daily* reported that the Hebrew Bible (to the exclusion of the New Testament) had been added to the recommended reading list for high-school students within the Shanghai school system. The reasoning given: "because of the contribution it made to world civilization and the important ideas therein" and to "better understand the Western mindset so heavily enrooted in biblical ideas". The possibility that the Hebrew Bible has contributed to the intellectual progress of its readers, and of those who believe and study it in earnest, is appreciated by Chinese education policy-makers. The Shanghai Education Commission's policy to encourage study of it is motivated by the assumption that, by understanding it better, discourse with foreigners and introduction of the West's underlying intellectual underpinnings would become more forthcoming.

The study of the Hebrew Bible with classical and modern Jewish commentary as opposed to Christian exegesis is deemed specifically valuable. It is not clear why, either because of the concern with Christian missionary activity, or because of the interest in the Jewish Bible, or because the latter's preoccupation with doctrine and its relative simplicity regarding themes and protagonists makes it arguably less fulfilling as a subject of multidisciplinary investigation.

Indeed, the Hebrew Bible may be useful for a civilization such as China. Jewish ideas have been at the forefront of nation-building techniques since

the début of the Hebrew Bible almost three thousand years ago. It gave birth to many national principles, to revolutionary impulses, to utopian ideas and innovative national agendas which have been integrated into the policies of enlightened countries, often without them being aware.

It has, after all, served as a law and constitutional basis for various civilizations, and a source of spiritual authority for billions of people. It has been used to inspire small and large institutional structures, armies, nations, as well as individuals, their literary, linguistic and artistic output. Though primarily preserved within religious frameworks, none the less it has filtered through, been interpreted and animated countless ideological systems. It is studied by modern scholars, religious and secular alike, and its influence is evident in many features of modern society. Its durability and its relevance and application, even outside theological settings, is an argument for continued attention by scholars, kings, philosophers, nation builders and informed observers of society. The Chinese have now included themselves in the list of nations that offer respectful attention to biblical literature as one of the important classics of human civilization.

The significance of the Bible to China is that the Bible tells a story of the development of a society that is destined for greatness. It recounts a nation's trials and transitions, errors, sin and self-criticism, which culminates in victory. It has great universal applicability. It is a social, political, literary and ethical text that appeals to the human spirit. It asserts optimism and hope for a better world, and teaches responsibility and leadership. Its teachings and ethic have various parallels within Chinese thinking and have paved the way for the formation of modern universal ethics. Its heroes are complex and therefore inspiring role models. The monotheistic idea may be an important intellectual instrument in societal progress and useful in developing a Chinese identity. It is highly interpretable to many conditions, from the most primitive to the most advanced. It has had a history of continual influence for over 2500 years, one of the few traditions that can match and even surpass China's scholarly tradition.

It is a source of hope for its readers. Its main theme is that of the development of a society and its transition from poverty to affluence, especially applicable to the Chinese condition. Its teachings and ethic have various parallels within Chinese thinking from ancient to modern times. Its heroes are complex role models developed over hundreds of years of editing and refashioning, and therefore aspiring to be like them imbues complexity of thought in the admirer. Teaching stories of biblical heroes may sound like an infantile chore but in fact may be a significant contributor to the development of children's imagination and sense of self as they mature. It nurtures an empathy with the development of the Israelite nation, even though the nation is criticized for its sins, seen for its ugly traits, its weaknesses and its betrayals of justice. The lesson learned is that criticism does not prevent admiration and empathy; it might even enhance it.

The Bible has been used as a law, placed as the basis of the spirituality of various civilizations', used to inspire small and large institutional structures,



believed in by billions, and used as a basis for literature and art and language. The Bible has been used as a narrative for many different religions and, even though Israel is the protagonist, it was interpreted to mean different things for different people. The metaphor of Israel was applied to the Christians as it was to Africans as it was to the Mormons and even the Americans. Today “liberation theology” in Latin America uses the metaphor of Israel to give hope to the poverty-stricken and the hungry, the lesson being that they are Israel, soon to be freed from the “bondage of Egypt”.

The Bible is a work primarily preserved by religions, but has found itself an accompanying agent of many ideological systems. It is studied by modern scholars and fused into most parts of modern society. As in the past, the Hebrew Bible may still be deserving of the attentions of kings, philosophers and nation-builders.

Below are some of the areas relating to biblical studies that may be of particular interest and relevance to China.

The notion of a weekend and the principle of public holidays – in a country that only recently instituted limitations on work hours, which is only enforced in certain sectors anyway, the idea of a day of rest has important applications. A day of rest has become a convention in Western societies, inspired by the enforced day of Sabbath rest introduced in the Bible. It ensured human dignity and the right to rest from work at least one in seven days. The Roman historian Tacitus remarked that “the Jews are the laziest of the nations, they have a habit of resting one day in seven, and even their slaves do no work”. In neighboring societies to ancient Israel there was no such idea of a day of rest. Even the notion of a seven-day calendar cycle was not in vogue. Slaves worked without respite; the wealthy never worked. The idea of resting one in seven would have worried many rulers and maybe caused them to suspect great economic loss and reduction of productivity, and destabilization. Remarkably, and counter-intuitively, it did not lead to lost productivity but had the opposite effect. It spurred productivity, and the work that humanity does in six days has amply compensated for one day (and now two) of lost productivity. This type of “intellectual technology” rapidly spread throughout the world with Christianity and Islam, and today is a standard-bearer of Western practice. Both the principles of human dignity and the right to a limitation on work burden, as well as the principle of improved productivity by resting, are born of this principle. Both are indispensable to human development.

The rule of law – “every man is equal before the law” – is the basis of modern secular governance. This idea was a unique innovation of Moses and is the basis of Judaism. While today it is obvious, it was a radical idea in 1000BCE. Only in the past few years have Chinese authorities formally recognized the importance of an economic and social system guided by law.

The notion of checks and balances, which is part and parcel of democratic norms today, is an idea introduced in the Bible. When Caesars and emperors had the absolute power of gods, the kings of Israel, the priests and the prophets combined an elaborate check and balance of each other’s power. Each one

argued their claim and authority to express the will of the divine; none was able to do so without being checked by the other; and none, including king and high priest, were free of the law. This principle lies at the very basis of developed legal systems today.

The principle that leadership must concern itself with the individual's actions and that a nation is a sum of its people, who should be counted and play a role in their nation's destiny, is a working principle in democracy. Its roots are in the Mosaic system.

The rights of weaker and disenfranchised elements in society – the orphan, the widow, the slave, the poor, the immigrant – were vigorously protected in biblical laws as one of the criteria of becoming a holy nation. While the masses of people had rights, so did those who could not represent themselves. The principle of modern democracy that protects the rights of minorities, secures the weak, grants child support, pensions and benefits by taxing the wealthier is a direct ideological progeny from the Laws of Moses. The idea that the group is responsible for all its parts was not to be taken for granted. They are values that secularism imported from the Bible via Christianity.

Behind one of the seemingly less important (and deceptively modest) of the Ten Commandments lies one of the axiomatic principles by which civilization's development was founded and was able to grow: "Do not covet your fellow's wife, do not desire the house of your fellow, his field, his manservant, his maidservant, his ox, his donkey and anything belonging to your fellow."<sup>62</sup>

The basis of human organization and economics is founded on the idea of "possession". A person owns something. Who says he owns it? What is there to stop a poor man who has nothing and is hungry from taking something from a wealthy man who has everything and who would not miss it if you stole it a hundred times? The rational intellect has argued that you take something you need, whether it "belongs" to you or not. Modern theories of socialism argued that it does not belong to the rich man more than to the poor, that there should be equal (or at least equitable) distribution of wealth. Yet for thousands of years the principle by which humanity has been able to slowly grow its economy and amass wealth enough to develop complex societies has been premised on the working idea of "possession". In places where there has been no rigid conception of property, large-scale development did not occur. There was no incentive. There is probably no single idea more effective than "possession" in the history and philosophy of economics. It may be reduced to a simple moral principle advocated and preserved in the Bible: "thou shall not desire your fellow's property".

Conversely, by indicating "not to desire what belongs to others" the implication of individual possession is assumed. The importance of self-identity, self-worth and personal belongings is also implied. Just as you do not desire *his* property, he cannot desire *your* property. The working principles of the Bible were of individualism and possession as opposed to the working principles of other civilizations. The Bible did not necessarily invent the ideas,

but it advocated them and was preserved because these ideas proved essential to the growth of nations.

Hence we observe that a seemingly innocuous idea suggested in the idea of “thou shall not covet your fellow’s property” can have far-reaching effect and influence on the mentality of a group which in turns leads to consequences in ways the conceivers may not have understood.

In Chinese–Confucian thinking, in contrast, the ultimate ideal is the service of the individual to the State, the self-nullification of the individual for the good of the group.<sup>63</sup> There is no developed sense of individuality, of individual needs or rights, or of individual possession. This subject is complex, and this is not the place to discuss it, but this principle may be seen in many expressions of Chinese life, though it is increasingly changing. Chinese mystical thought, from Buddhism to Daoism, developed the idea of self-nullification as a high spiritual attainment. However appealing these ideas are to the mystically minded, they have not shown the facility to sustain large multi-leveled societies and complex economies. There are some who argue that this style of thinking has stymied Chinese development, and rapid, large-scale and multi-leveled development has only been possible since Western (or Judeo-biblical) ideas, such as the ones enumerated, gained currency in Asian consciousness.

### **The contribution of Jewish tradition and spirituality to Chinese nation-building**

In the wake of internationalism and industrialization, and the deluge of challenges of modern economics and twenty-first-century nuances, which have landed suddenly on the Chinese population without much preparation and time for psychological adjustment, a set of ideals, ethics, morals, teachings, intellectual and psychological techniques and instruments may be necessary to help navigate the pitfalls of these new circumstances. Not to say that Chinese tradition does not have ethics and psychological techniques to deal with change, but the changes and developments in many cases emanate from the West, and in many instances Jewish communities were abreast of them as they occurred and rapidly developed ethical and psychological accompaniments for them, which were uniquely tailored to check and respond to them, with the interests of the human soul, the welfare of the family, the concerns for the fabric of society and the less fortunate an important consideration in their formulation.

Jewish spirituality in particular may be uniquely suitable for the circumstances and crises that Chinese civilization is presently undergoing. The development of a spirituality in the age of economic development and rampant materialism is invariably one of the tasks of Chinese thinkers, philosophers and social leaders. They will have to address issues relating to personal and domestic ethics: the nurturing of personal qualities of goodness, charity, good deeds, proper inter-personal relations, treatment of peers and the less

fortunate, and other ethical ideas that socialist–communist thought did not develop and is difficult to justify outside a religious or spiritual framework. Various issues need to be addressed, including: a mechanism to assist the family unit in the age of modernity and guide it as it experiences the effects of socialist policy (including the One Child Policy); a doctrinal structure to reconcile the past with the present and future in the wake of modernity and the crisis of tradition; a mechanism to understand “the other” and the foreigner, as well as the poor and unfortunate in the wake of a large and expanding gap between rich and poor.

Judaism has a long history of articulating policy and teachings on these issues which has been an important source for its own capacity to rehabilitate and rejuvenate, and one of the “secrets” of its survival over millennia despite great adversity and numerical disadvantage and the lack of a national state to sponsor it.

As discussed above, the Jewish response to suffering may also be useful to China, which suffered under various occupations and Japanese oppression. Jewish responses to these events are of epic proportions, and much literature exists on the subject that may be of poetic, philosophic and literary value to Chinese scholars and individuals seeking an explanation for the wanton violence they were exposed to.

In Chapter 5 I discuss in greater detail the relevance of comparative diaspora studies, which may be one of the most important and fertile fields of comparative study.

The idea of “God” as an intellectual technology, which I discuss at length in another work,<sup>64</sup> is particularly useful for China’s nation-building capacities, especially as monotheism has demonstrated great prowess in the administration of large populations – mobilizing them around abstract ideas, adjoined to ethics and morality and family values and loyalty to a just government and law. The “technology” implicit in the idea of God proved so valuable it became part of the leadership structures of most European and Western governments for thousands of years to follow. Its ethical contributions may still be valuable today to a population which is seeking spiritual constructs and development.

As has been indicated by many historical examples (Christianity and Islam, Western democracy), using these Jewish paradigms has not kept religions or nations beholden to the Jewish people; most have developed the idea within their own cultural, historical and traditional crucibles. It is therefore perceived as a relatively “safe technology” with few repercussions or accompanying religious ideological threats.

### **Judaism and the Chinese family**

As mentioned above and discussed in more detail in another chapter, the function of the family to the stability of China is important, and the vested interests of parents in maintaining the family unit are high. Yet the Confucian

paradigms that facilitated family cohesion in the past have been weakened over the last century. The influence of socialism on the role of women and the effects of the One Child Policy have changed the dynamics in family units beyond recognition. The absence of siblings may cause a child to seek profound connectedness, which was traditionally found in the family, through friendship or through the internet or other media. The Chinese family is at an existential risk. As discussed elsewhere, in response to this, Christianity and its concern for family values is likely to grow rapidly in China. Jewish tradition and experience in maintaining the cohesive fabric of the family is of equal, if not superior, value if its wisdom were to be harnessed. This is not to say that Chinese should adopt Jewish habits *per se*, but various examples may be useful for Chinese families as well as sociologists and social thinkers charged with the responsibility of navigating these challenges.

### **The Sabbath and China**

The Sabbath and Jewish holidays were the centerpiece of Jewish family activity. While the subject is too detailed to discuss here, the traditions of the Sabbath and holidays, and the meals and customs attending them, created a strong family environment and fostered discussion and social alliances unlike in any other culture and may be one of the less recognized yet most important contributors to the success of Jewish education and family life. Attempts to restore the centrality of the family may be informed by the methods Jews have employed over millennia.

### **Jewish Studies and Chinese educational values**

The reverence that Jewish tradition holds towards study and education is not an exaggeration. It is part of religious doctrine as well as of Jewish cultural morés. Judaism attaches importance to the process of learning, as an end in itself and as a holy occupation. The Jewish attitude is one of the intrinsic value of learning; it is not necessarily related to the work one does afterwards, but to the study itself. In contrast, other cultures view education as a means to an end, a way to earn income and/or support a family. Chinese/Confucian attitudes towards study are often compared to Jewish attitudes, although distinct differences exist. An important difference is that Chinese generally view education as part of their service to their nation. Their ability to work within the bureaucracy depends on their success in studies. Education in China is a means to attain a government job and secure a stable livelihood in the service of the State. The underpinnings of Chinese education are therefore geared to developing competence and reliability, not mold-breaking originality or excellence. The latter policy, which breeds a high level of mediocrity, is conceptually different from the prisms which breed individuality at many levels. As is evident in the Bibliography, a large number of Chinese authors have written about Jewish education techniques,

no doubt more to appeal to the Chinese obsession with education than to understand the underpinnings of Jewish thought on the subject.

### **Jewish Studies and communism**

The ethical and ideological foundations of communism and Marxism are arguably derived from the Bible, too. It may even be argued that Marxist utopian ideas echo the messianic ideas of Jews preceding him. Bearing in mind that many of the advocates and founding fathers of communism and Marxism were Jewish, that their ideology was inspired by their motivation to find solutions to the “Jewish problem”, it may be said that Judaism has adjusted itself to accommodate it as a legitimate political and socio-economic expression. Some rabbis and Jewish thinkers could be credited with being proto-socialists. The kibbutz movement, which has been hailed as one of the most successful forms of communism, is still thriving in Israel with many religious kibbutzim testimony to Judaism’s accommodations with socialism. I discuss the relationship between Judaism and socialism in another chapter; suffice here to say that, while Jewish Studies is by no means identified with any political or economic lines of thought, it has demonstrated the ability to fuse with socialist theory, and perhaps is a natural and highly fertile partner to this pursuit.

### **Jewish self-criticism as a model for China**

Jewish attitudes to debate and self-criticism are legendary features of Talmudic and Jewish culture. The Bible makes no attempt to disguise or soften its harsh criticism of Israel. Although many opportunities existed to edit or change the biblical texts to soften or rephrase its rhetoric to “save face”, none the less the schools of prophets who preserved these texts kept them as they were, believing that criticism and self-criticism were indispensable to the religious process of self-correction. This culture has remained part and parcel of Jewish thought and intellectual productivity. Ironically, the greatest leaders, champions and spokespeople of the Jewish people were also the nation’s chief critics and defenders at the same time, in an almost contrived tension. The function of criticism has therefore come to be seen as not so much an attack on or defamation of the Jewish people as a mechanism through which the nation is saved and finally redeemed.

This culture which embraces criticism as a positive value may be of special interest to China, which is particularly sensitive to disparagement and censure. Critics and dissenters of Chinese policy, especially those who air their thoughts in public, are considered to be betrayers of the country. Airing China’s problems to foreigners or abroad is a particularly heinous crime. Causing someone to be humiliated by public disgrace is an irredeemable assault on a person, and culturally it is almost inconceivable for them to be forgiven. Inferiors are expected to “give face” to their superiors, and an endemic culture

of covering up mistakes and problems is rooted in Chinese respect for peers and superiors. The result is a systematic turning the other way in the face of failure, which in turn causes more problems.

The propensity for Chinese scholars to censor themselves so as not to offend is perhaps the most problematic phenomenon crippling the means by which it could secure its stable and systematic development. The expectation to “save face” is so deeply internalized that, even if permitted, most would be reluctant publicly to offer negative or offending remarks on the country or its leaders.

Contrasting this to the Jewish perspective of debate is useful. The main thrust of Talmudic thinking occurs through challenge and disagreement on issues of law. The very word “*Isra-el*” as used in the Bible literally means to “struggle with God”. Accounts of protagonists, legendary figures, rabbis and mystics who argued, debated or even sued God and finally (mostly) won abound in the Bible, the Talmud, the Midrash and later rabbinic teachings until the present. Jewish politics presents itself as a division between two or more schools of thought debating with each other.

The method by which bitter historical struggles were rendered into gentlemanly debate between scholars, with their differences reconciled through logic, is part of a brilliant editing technique mastered by the editors of the Talmud, which itself is worthy of comprehensive study. This editing process has relevance to China as it seeks to find a middle way negotiating the expression of opinion, while preserving the authority of its leadership.

In a fascinating paper given to an audience of Chinese scholars in Nanjing University, Professor Robert Daum of the University of British Columbia illustrated how bitter arguments in the Talmud were dealt with by censoring and chastising the lesser scholar by his superior, but the former’s position was later rehabilitated by the editors of the Talmud, so as to illustrate the importance of the varying sides of the debate. He showed that, while dissenting opinions were aired in the pages of the Talmud, they were written in a way that finally gave credence to the dominant view. By this method the editors of the Talmud were able, on one hand, to ensure that differences of opinion were heard and respect was given to all scholars of the Torah, even if their views were not accepted; while, on the other hand, the position of the main school of thought was not undermined.<sup>65</sup> The techniques of Talmudic editing could be highly instructive in lending the pervasive Chinese censorship insight into how future generations may perceive it if it is too draconian or intolerant of other positions.

Indeed, Chinese academics have noticed this phenomenon in Jewish intellectual culture and have written about it. The aforementioned Professor Chen Yiyi of Beijing University, in a paper he delivered at a Jewish Studies conference, examined the conflict between the biblical prohibition against idolatry and references in the Book of Kings to King David possessing a large idol. He pointed out the difference between the ideal and the reality, and the appreciation of the biblical editors of this conflict and their willingness to recognize it within the text. Chen noted, as many other Chinese academics



have, that biblical study is a useful vehicle by which to understand and air issues and ideas which may be difficult to do while referring directly to China.<sup>66</sup> He indicated that the above-mentioned biblical problem was similar to the par between the ideal of socialism against the reality of capitalism; or the ideal of atheism against the reality of a pantheon of superstitions abounding in China. Chen explained that, while Jewish sources discuss and analyze the discrepancies between the ideal and the reality becoming part of its culture, in China acute silence regarding discrepancies reigns, becoming part of a culture unable to reconcile such conflicts. Chen used this example to illustrate how the study of Judaism and the Bible can become a repository of Chinese dialogue about itself. Because many themes relating to social and political life take place in the Bible and are relayed in Jewish texts, issues relating to China can be addressed through them, without directly confronting Chinese culture and the reluctance to criticize authority directly. This, according to Zhang Shuqing, is especially useful under the present conditions of censorship, where directly addressing the nation's problems is prohibited.<sup>67</sup>

### **Methods of interpretation**

The Jewish interpretive tradition is renowned for its almost gymnastic feats of mental and imaginative elasticity; methods of argumentation; use of a variety of logical methods to arrive at far-reaching and often innovative conclusions; drawing relevance from the most arcane musings to make them deeply relevant to the present; the use of literal, allegorical, exegetical and mystical techniques with profound and elaborate insight into human behavior.

The ability to interpret the Bible is probably the single most decisive reason for its survival until the present. Entire chapters of the Hebrew Bible would have become incoherent or irrelevant had they not been continually interpreted and reinterpreted. Similarly, the Talmud and other rabbinic traditions are interpreted by every generation of scholars and are endowed with contemporary relevance. The interpretive drive is informed by the exposure of Jewish scholars to varieties of input; being that they hailed from different countries, political frameworks, language systems, and cultural mors from around the Jewish Diaspora, great diversity and insight informed from a cross section of human knowledge was fed into the interpretive system.

These commentaries are studied and taught in the framework of courses in Bible, Talmud and mysticism, and form a united corpus which endows Judaism with a semblance of depth and multileveled sophistication. Jewish interpretive ability has relevance to China because it validates the interpretive process more than the content of the commentary, as the source of authority and strength. Observing a nation as it grows or rejuvenates from a re-reading of its tradition is encouraging to those who also seek to adjust to new conditions. For example, the Jewish ability to recuperate from the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by using rabbinic interpretations that re-interpreted it in spiritual non-physical terms, and to find a compensating mechanism to

replace the sacrificial cult central to first-century Jewish practice by re-interpreting sacrifices in terms of prayer and charity, is testament to the palpable value of interpretive technique. Countless examples of this exist, too numerous to expound here.

Had Chinese revolutionaries used interpretive methods to phase out antiquated Chinese habits, instead of military or political might, decades if not centuries of internal strife may have been avoided. Because of the relative insular and protected nature of traditional Chinese scholars, who knew little about the outside world, never having experienced a diaspora condition, having little exposure to the world outside the Middle Kingdom, and denigrating foreigners who visited and dismissing their wisdom, those scholars consequently were unable to generate the variety of experiences to inform innovative interpretation of their own traditions. Fu Youde and other Chinese scholars focus on the Jewish prowess at re-creating itself, including its reconstruction at Yavneh after Jerusalem's fall and the emergence of Jewish intellectuals during the Jewish Enlightenment period in Germany, as a model for Chinese cultural reconstruction.<sup>68</sup> There are many other examples of how Jews re-interpret and re-build their cultural lives; these are the ones which have been readily taught within Chinese contexts.

During my tenure teaching Chinese students, I focused on the general subject of innovative interpretation and tried to show how rabbinic interpretation was often far-reaching and greatly stretching of their literal meanings, and their achievements in doing so were as far-reaching. I always encouraged my students to take on their own interpretive exercises and see how, through using models (not content) of Jewish interpretation, they could project different meanings onto Chinese culture, tradition and reality. In this way a more abstract but fissile Jewish-Chinese fusion may be achieved – although, if done properly, the Jewish dimensions are likely to be disguised in structure.

I also tried to show my students that, while the culture of debate and interpretation expressed itself in what seemed to be a profound lack of consensus and even in bitter debate, none the less a more profound unity emerged from the interpretive process capable of producing an abstract rallying point, in itself a source of fraternity and intellectual interaction. This point must be of particular fascination for Chinese, for whom dissent is a subject of concern and alarm.

## **A critique of Chinese academia**

Despite a decade or more of Jewish Studies pedagogy in China, still no world class scholars of Judaism have emerged from the ranks of Chinese academia.

In general, proportionately few Chinese-trained scholars have as yet been recognized as world-class scholars contributing to the advance of the general fields of history, philosophy, archeology and sociology (this does not include China-related subjects). There is an uncomfortable awareness in Chinese academic and policy circles that, despite their numbers and the size of their

economy and the depth of their resources, and the number of universities, scholars and students, their original and creative output and their contribution to the larger body of universal knowledge is proportionally inferior. The desire and duty to improve this record is motivated by national pride (which we shall see below is part of a circular problem of cause and effect). On the other hand, many foreign scholars excel and are recognized as scholars contributing original and innovative insight into Chinese language, history, archeology, government and politics.

This is not because Chinese are incapable; many are brilliant and certainly diligent. This discussion focuses on the making (or not) of Jewish Studies scholars; but the principles are likely to apply to other disciplines, too. The years that passed could have sufficed to train reasonably informed scholars of Hebrew and Jewish texts. There are certainly competent Chinese scholars familiar with historical periods and themes, personalities and philosophical discourse within Judaism. While impressive, their insights are gleaned from secondary literature and translated texts, and a lack of the “soul” of the subject seems to pervade.

An answer to this absence may lie in the Chinese scholar’s dependence on the university, and his/her service to the sinicization of the discipline over its mastery. As to whether this is a case of academic dishonesty or a characteristic of Chinese academia that led the May Fourth patriots to try to terminate the Confucian hegemony over scholarship, debate continues.

For scholars at Chinese academic institutions, where self-censorship and service to the institution and to the country are implicit fundamentals, criticism is a subversive and unpatriotic act. While this is not the place for a full critique of Chinese academia, in so far as it relates to Jewish Studies, I will put aside the four years of service in Chinese academia to venture on a Western scholar’s duty, and a Talmudist’s habit, of critiquing some fundamentals.<sup>69</sup>

At first I should admit that over the past years teaching and researching in China I was fascinated by the ways in which scholars and graduate students perceived the material they studied and the ways in which they found relevance and applicability for the topic within the context of the emergence of modern China. I was delighted to hear how Judaism was useful for China’s “national reconstruction”. At first I found the approach creative, unusual and flattering. Humble and tiny Judaism could contribute to the reconstruction of the giant Chinese state! I admit to thinking that this approach was innovative, and I invested time and thought in developing new vistas, directing students to biblical, Talmudic, medieval and modern philosophic texts, themes and sources which I thought of important strategic reference within the Chinese context. For a while I censored myself, and limited my contribution to positive ways and ideas, and saw it as my duty to serve my employers by helping to extract salient and useful applications from the archives of Jewish wisdom. I may not have realized that I was conforming to the exact expectation of me within the Chinese context.<sup>70</sup>

However, on further consideration and a better understanding of Chinese academia, it gradually occurred to me that Chinese scholars needed little encouragement from me to find relevance in the service of his/her nation. Finding applicability was a norm, even a patriotic duty within which they were deeply immersed. After reviewing the titles of academic books and articles on Judaism written in the Chinese language, it became clear that this was not an innovative trend, but a systematic/compulsive predilection. For those to whom patriotism was not their sole motive, application of their research to the Chinese condition reflected self-referentialism. The material was of secondary importance to its potential applicability. I began thirsting for the purity of study intrinsically-motivated study.

I began to wonder if the obsession with “applicability” was one of the features distinguishing Western and Chinese academic systems. I thought about the disciplines and subjects that colleagues studied and wrote theses on at Oxford, Cambridge, Sydney and Hebrew universities, and how drawing applicability to the present was an almost un-academic and impolite interruption of academic purity (at best kept in the back of one’s mind or left for another scholar to investigate), unless of course the subject was itself of a contemporary nature.<sup>71</sup> It occurred to me that the modern Chinese education system may be a continuing form of servitude to the imperial agenda, a residual Confucian habit of the *Keju* system which was (believed to be) terminated at the turn of the century.

In Western (and Jewish) terms, study and intellectual investigation are an undertaking of intrinsic value, without the necessity for direct relevance to contemporary circumstance or in the service of any national agenda. At the very least, European and American academia did not have a history of subservience to a single homogenous national agenda; if, indeed, there were agendas to a scholar’s research, the converging and synthesis of different agendas of different scholars, to different masters, became a multitude of opinions and formed a rigorous discourse.

The unspoken obligation in Chinese academia to find “applicability” increasingly seems like a miscarriage of a fundamental ideal of freedom of academic pursuit. Its subservience to a single national agenda must irritate those whose passion for their subject transcends national affiliation. In the Confucian system which dominated China over millennia, scholars were trained to serve the State. Little ethical legitimacy existed for training or nurturing literacy or skills outside the primary duty to use these skills to serve the master. A scholar’s legitimacy was in his subservience to bureaucrats of the political echelons, and in this way an educated person became empowered. The inextricable interdependence on each other renders it difficult to break this molecular relationship.

Western scholarship, on the other hand, emerged from more diverse settings: schools, monasteries, seminaries, *yeshivot* and universities, which were often at odds with the ruling cliques or at least in competition or discourse with them. Academic achievement served conceptually different functions to

different cliques – one in service of country or God, the other in pursuit of truth and knowledge (or to challenge existing conceptions of truth and knowledge). Interpretation of information in the service of God, as allusive as the divine can be, was sufficiently abstract to generate a variety of methods and goals. The socio-political-strategic goal of education in the Chinese context, however, leaves little room for such imaginative speculation and tension with authority.

During these deliberations, and after investigating the history of the Chinese education system, I came to believe that Chinese academia, while disciplined and capable in many respects, while possessing advantages over Western systems in various areas, while boasting a two-thousand-year intact history, was none the less still in relative infancy and had faced too few challenges and had been dominated by stimuli too homogenous to undergo meaningful transformation.

Of course this problem does not burden the conscience of mainstream Chinese academics, certainly not the political or administrative echelons, for which truth and the national interest are irrevocably linked. So long as the might of the central authorities supports and mandates this pious fiction, the structure can continue indefinitely, as evinced by the durability of the Confucian system over millennia. Indeed, their contention is legitimate. What is the purpose of education and engendering skills amongst one's citizens if they do not serve the interests of the group? What is the point of education if it undermines and destabilizes the hand that feeds it? While greatly evocative, these questions and their ramifications are too complex to be dealt with in this work.

Suffice to say that the mastery of any complex field – Jewish classics (Talmud, Bible, Midrash, Commentaries, Responsa, Kabballah and philosophic works) included – cannot be achieved to an internationally acclaimed standard while the scholar's primary focus is the service of another subject, especially if this subject is as soul-consuming as patriotism. Pitched as a test of one's fidelity to the nation, any research subject will naturally be appropriated to serve as an instrument for the glorification of the country; and rigorous standards of research cannot be sustained when social, political, ethical and cultural pressures exist and when dedication to the material, commitment to understanding the intentions, the arguments, the faith and the issues facing the writers of texts are not the primary focus. The scholar, too busy finding applicatory potential in the material, is distracted or tempted to extract information out of context, and consequently less inclined to contribute to understanding the context and circumstances of the subject itself. Much Jewish scholarship requires a commitment to reading and contributing to textual analysis – a difficult skill to acquire but possible when the texts are of primary importance. Some of the greatest Talmudic scholars were known for being almost infatuated with the text.<sup>72</sup> If any hope exists of nurturing first-class Chinese scholars of Jewish texts, the text itself must be more valuable than its application to the Chinese homeland.

This is not to say that there is no room for interpretation and applying the wisdom of classic texts to the present. This is far from true. An entire genre of Jewish scholarship relates to the application of the classical corpus to contemporary life circumstances. Most bodies of knowledge eventually surface in contemporary applications, but the process in which they do so is structured differently. Indeed, interpretation is deemed valuable and necessary, and the material uniquely lends itself to broad and creative interpretations; none the less, the interpretation or the re-interpretation thereof is grounded in an intimate understanding of and respect for its original context, and the original context is continually consulted and referenced. The permeability and fertility of Jewish texts may be attributable to the Talmudist's efforts to place himself into the discourse itself and understand the gamut of contextual applications, threshing out the possibilities with skill and passion, and identifying the formulas within their own modules, making their later extraction and usage within other prisms easier. The interpretive process, however, can always be drawn back to the original context, and a re-interpretation can ensue, creating a discourse between modernity and antiquity via the text.

It can be argued that the passion effused by religious commitment is a decisive factor in the mastery of this subject. Chinese spiritual predilections, if we may refer to them as such, are trained towards the welfare of the nation, and less inclined towards the significance of the word; perhaps this is a major hurdle in their achievement of scholarly prominence in the field.

However, we observe that over the past century secular Biblical Studies scholarship has developed to prolific levels; and, even though secular, scholars display mastery, dedication and pedantic concern for each and every detail, matching and surpassing the standards of the religious scholar.

We are left wondering why the level of Chinese scholarship remains superficial. I am asked by Jewish Studies scholars around the world for references to Chinese scholars' interpretations of Bible or Talmudic verses, or their interpretations of specific concepts, and am often left no choice but to reply that Chinese scholars have still not made progress in developing specific areas of scholarship; the fields are still very general. Compared to the depth of research and argumentation amongst other international scholars or other cultural exchanges, Chinese scholarship on Jewish Studies seems only at an introductory stage, not yet having made the significant leap forward to more rigorous academic levels and still developing introductory material and rationales for their scholarship.

### **Transferring and translating frames of reference**

This is not to say that genuine scholarship and originality have not emerged from the pen of Chinese scholars; they certainly have. But the productivity is mainly in the realm of translating novel material, introducing new ideas, rendering foreign concepts into Chinese language, terminology and frames of reference, and enjoining it within a Chinese national context. Penetrating



contributions to the subject itself are not yet a *forté* of these scholars, though the Chinese perspective may yet offer fascinating vistas for consideration. The question remains whether secondary scholarship is enough, and whether China's departments of Jewish Studies should at all seek or aspire to nurturing scholars with skills to access and analyze primary sources, or rest content with ensuring sound translations and developing a body of thought based on these.

Despite some shortfalls, the above-mentioned process is no small task. In a conversation I had with Sir Isaiah Berlin in March 1997 in his lodgings at All Souls College, Oxford, a short time before he died, he addressed my question how he, of all the brilliant Oxford dons, had come to be perceived as one of the greatest philosophers of modern Britain. He answered that he believed this was not because of his exceptional intellect but because of a combination of circumstances: having emigrated from Eastern Europe as a young boy and continuing his interest in Russian language and literature, he came of age when Russia was at the height of its superpower status, and his familiarity with and expertise in its literature and thought placed him in a unique situation as a cultural interlocutor translating and introducing Russian and other European literature, thinkers and ideas to the English-speaking public. Berlin earnestly believed that his role as a translator and introducer of an "otherly" genre, more than any profoundly insightful genius, caused him to be considered as a "great" himself. Aside from his modesty, this view reveals the critical role of the interpreter and the introducer of new ideas into a language and context which is eager to embrace or learn. In the Chinese context, this process is much the same, if not greater. The act of introducing a new subject, defining terms and frames of reference, explaining and contextualizing "the other" and transcending psychological, political, intellectual, cultural and linguistic barriers and bridging them with another culture is a challenge that only a certain type of scholar, with social and political acumen, and one who is familiar with both, could achieve.

Several Chinese scholars are doing this and are becoming increasingly recognized for their contributions. It was said of Sir Isaiah, however, that he spoke Russian like he spoke English, only more quickly; it is well known that he spoke English very quickly. His familiarity with the original texts in the Russian language, his close relations with leading Russian literary figures and his intimate knowledge of the nuances of their culture and thought, together with his own observations, made him who he became. The Chinese are still lacking a thorough understanding of the first three criteria for mastery of the subject, and achieving them within a Jewish context requires singular efforts and immersion in another culture, which may not be convenient for an academic with only professional ties to his/her material. There are also cultural barriers which make it more difficult for ethnic Chinese to access traditional Jewish seminaries and/or converse with traditional scholars. But sufficient inter-cultural scholars and institutions exist to make this possible, if only the will and means existed.



At this relatively early stage in the evolution of Jewish Studies in China, it is necessary to conceptualize a strategy and identify which steps should be prioritized over the coming years and decades. In many respects, Professor Fu Youde, mentioned above, has made the most significant in this direction. His center for Judaic Studies is focused on:

1. Systematically introducing Judaism into China, facilitating greater understanding and appreciation of Jewish culture and its significance to China amongst more and more Chinese people;
2. Translating core material and classic Jewish works;
3. Teaching postgraduates and training future scholars, through courses, symposiums and summer schools;
4. Attracting foreign scholars to teach and research in Jewish Studies in China and develop scholarly exchanges on all levels between Jews and Chinese;
5. Developing appreciation and exchange on cultural and intellectual levels.

His efforts are slowly distilling throughout academic departments around China as graduates take up positions and continue their careers, and their learning seeps down into their other writing and teaching duties.

Fu Youde's own research, mainly on Maimonides, but also on German Jewish thinkers including Buber, Heschel, Levinas and others, is focused on their method of thought as representative of a unique Jewish style, which he describes as "both/and", which is opposite to "either/or" – his most important emphasis being the unique way by which Jewish thinkers reach accommodations with modernity while preserving some aspect of their Jewishness. He also writes and probes the ideas of "the Jewish spirit", which fascinates the Chinese, being representative of an entirely "otherly" yet dignified culture. He therefore discusses the nature of Jewish faith in God; the idea of covenant; the significance of the Torah; of rituals; the meaning of the Sabbath and other festivals, which bind and unite Jews around the world and throughout time. In addition Fu Youde is also concerned with comparison and contrast of Judaism (mainly using the Reform movement as a model) and Confucianism, and has been especially interested in extracting what he identifies as valuable Jewish elements and assimilating them for the reconstruction of Chinese culture. In these ways he in effect has been setting down the intellectual underpinnings and justification vis-à-vis government authorities and mainstream academia for the burgeoning discipline.

In so doing, his thought on and his grasp of the subject are also maturing, and his familiarity with the diversity of Jewish thought is continuing. It is the deepening exchange and discourse amongst scholars like Fu Youde, committed to the study and teaching of the subject and capable of articulating the subtleties and sublime features of Jewish life in the Chinese language, that has the potential for the most meaningful results. Still a young man of 50, in the course of the next thirty years his contribution to the Jewish–Chinese

nexus is inestimable. There is little doubt that historians will recognize him as a pioneer and a champion of the process and a key interlocutor of the two cultures.

### **Student interest in the Hebrew language**

Despite his pioneering work and his efforts to pave the way for future Jewish Chinese discourse, Fu Youde relies on translated material for his own writings, and relies on peers and discourse within his own academic community, which takes time to evolve, to generate the necessary tension and academic savor that the discipline thrives on.

Probably as a result of the recognition that, as long as students are not committed to the primary languages of their research material, the discipline falls short of academic expectations, he has pushed for the accelerated study of Hebrew language as a core course for postgraduate students in the department of religion and has even ventured into encouraging it amongst undergraduate students of philosophy.

This daring move is a double-edged sword, on the one hand instilling the necessary scholarly skills in young students and preparing them to become leaders in the field, on the other hand forcing them (Chinese students are not yet given the option to choose their undergraduate courses) to learn a language in which they may find little interest and deterring future interest in Jewish thought, theology or other non-linguistic disciplines.

The problem is a difficult one. Jewish Studies advisors who have come to the Center have all noted the priority in teaching Hebrew to students so as to develop access to primary sources, while all recognize that Hebrew language is the least interesting and driest of the subjects in Jewish Studies, requiring a great deal of time and effort, in addition to their English-language studies, with little mental stimulation which is naturally what students of philosophy and religion are seeking. The motive that exists amongst Christian theological students to learn Hebrew to understand the Hebrew Bible does not exist amongst Chinese students, hence the subject is prohibitive.

As observed below from responses to surveys, student impressions of Hebrew study are decidedly less enthusiastic than their interest in Jewish Studies in general.

Hebrew is a dead language and too different from Chinese, they have no relation and it is unnecessary to study.

I think the Hebrew language is different from Chinese. We usually attach importance to pronunciation, though in Hebrew the phonetic symbol changes. In Chinese every meaning has a corresponding word. We call it Hanzhi, while in Hebrew, every word has a root, sort of like English. In order to learn Hebrew well we have to remember the root word along with different grammar. When reading Hebrew we should separate the root word and the grammar to understand its meaning.

Hebrew is only used by so little [sic] people and maybe it is a dead language now. I think I will never use it and don't need to study it in the future.

Hebrew is different from Chinese, we don't have complicated verbs.

Hebrew is interesting but very different. It is written from right to left, contains a lot of grammar, has male and female verbs, future and past tenses, active and passive.

I think the language is very complex and difficult, but I think the characters look beautiful.

It is very different from Chinese, but both are oldest [sic] languages. They are pictographic scripts. But Hebrew is easier to read than Chinese. Having learnt a semester I can pronounce almost all the Hebrew, which I still cannot do to all Chinese characters. Hebrew verbs are interesting, they can change forms.

### **The challenge of translating Judaism into Chinese**

The art of translation is a discipline which is discussed in great earnestness within Chinese literary circles and in departments of foreign languages. It is taken seriously by professionals, who teach and write on the theory and methodology which continue to develop. The problems relating to translation are especially acute in the Chinese language owing to the gulf between Chinese and Western civilization, to their respective cultural references and to the unique ideographic-pictographic nature of Chinese in contrast to the structure of most Western languages. Chinese scholars and theorists have developed elaborate systems, theories and methodologies to negotiate intercultural communication which has become a discipline in its own right, with centers and departments dedicated to teaching and researching in the field emerging at major universities.

None the less, the principles developed amongst professional translators of foreign literature are slow to be transferred to other departments and to filter into the training of scholars of other disciplines, who are also engrossed in translation projects. Hence translators of academic works throughout the academic sphere remain unschooled in literary theory. PhD students in history or philosophy characteristically take on a translation project for their academic supervisors with little guidance by their supervisors, who are characteristically too busy managing a larger team of translators. These graduate students produce work which, aside from the valuable information brought into the Chinese language, unfortunately also imports distortions and biases inferred from the existing Chinese frames of reference.

The urgency of accelerating the translation process resulting from the need to show the sponsoring State bureaus that work is being done and justify funding has caused oversight, carelessness and translations characterized by a lack of understanding of the original texts. Productivity is commonly measured in kilos rather than in quality.

Attempts to translate Kabbalistic or rabbinic texts, with the translation of words without understanding the heavily laden symbolism attached to them, represents a miscarriage of the translation process and undermines any integrity that may have accompanied the initiative.

The assumption that information can be copied, without necessarily understanding the formation and the history of the words, is a continual, perhaps endemic problem in the Chinese translation industry.

Until a there is critical mass of literature and an accumulation of scholars with the passion and commitment necessary to animate a rigorous discourse and serve as a critical authority over the quality of their output, there is little check and balance in place to inspire the translator to greater caution.

Owing to the inter-disciplinary nature of Jewish-related themes, with relevance to a range of academic departments and publishing houses, translators are drawn from many disciplines. Each may use his/her cultural references and choose his/her own terms to depict a concept. The result is lack of uniformity in terms, ideas, concepts, vocabulary, in addition to factual mistakes owing to lack of understanding and training. Unlike the work of Christian missionaries who came to China and set up their own translating committees to coordinate their work, Jewish Studies has no sponsor in the Jewish world, and little private funding has found its way to render order to the process. It may take decades to fix the errors committed in this unguided process. It may also be that this unmanaged and chaotic filtering of information through different channels, with different translations and unclear terminology, endows the Jewish experience in China with an ambiguity and undefined status which may have useful applications in the future.

Apart from the managerial challenges in matching suitable translators to material, one of the difficulties is finding scholars with the diverse interdisciplinary skills necessary, including training in Jewish and Hebrew Studies, as well as in translation and literary theory. During my tenure teaching and supervising Chinese PhD candidates, and recognizing some of these problems, I started looking for and recruiting English literature and foreign language graduates to continue MA and PhD research in Jewish Studies and hoped that the chosen students would exhibit a mind that combined sensitivity to the transfer of meaning between languages and gradual familiarity with Jewish ideas.

There exist difficulties in training these candidates. Jewish life is hard to understand without having lived it. Potential scholars would need to spend years studying Jewish religion and texts and language as a starter; time spent in Israel is also an important step, and time spent among religious Jews and in traditional Jewish Studies settings of inestimable value to the work of these future scholars. At present, the first stages have been achieved, and Chinese students, including several of my own, have made it to Hebrew and Bar Ilan University to pursue graduate studies. As of yet they have not entered traditional *yeshivot* or environments for textual study; perhaps this is still to come, but it is fraught with difficulties owing to the insular and exclusive nature of these institutions.

## **Translations of religious terms into Chinese**

Soon after embarking on the first semester of Jewish Studies courses, I came to the realization that the language barrier and conceptual and cultural pars were such that, in order to build a body of knowledge and a set of concepts which are fully understood, a text-based class was in order. I moved the majority of my teaching focus to texts, which included readings in the Hebrew Bible, Talmudic Tractates, Kabbalistic and Hasidic tracts.

During this process, together with two of my students, Gila Ouzhenhua and Dottie Tangmaoqin, who were especially active, we had a lot of discussion about the method of translating texts and concepts into Chinese. How should God's various names be translated? Transliterated? By which interpretation of the name should the Chinese characters be chosen? How should God's many attributes be translated? Should new characters be invented or should Daoist, Buddhist, Christian or other characters and references be used? We tried to develop effective and meaningful names of God, of divine attributes and major religious and conceptual terms.

One of the main points of deliberation was whether to co-opt existing terms either having evolved from early Chinese folk religion, especially from Daoism, or from conceptions formed in Buddhist, Islamic and Christian synthesis with Chinese language. The latter three all underwent centuries of effort to address this very question: whether to adopt existing terms and in doing so show the similarity of their new religious worldview with existing Chinese notions; or whether to devise new names and use different characters, to emphasize the specific and novel ideas inherent in their worldview, which was not appreciated within the existing Chinese lexicon, but over time would seep into the national frame of reference. The last alternative was to fuse new and old characters to form a semi-identifiable term.

It is interesting to observe the strategic path that ideologies and religions take as they enter a new country and set of cultural references, and how they choose to depict and present themselves. It has been observed by many scholars that the stone steles of the Jewish community of Kaifeng present an attempt to fuse Judaism with Confucianism and use Confucian terminology as if it were their own.

While I remained open-minded about the possibilities, complexities and subtleties of offering new words and altering translation practice, my general inclination was to depart from existing names and definitions of religious terms in favor of redefining and renaming religious conceptions using Jewish worldviews and commentary and Hebrew-based insight into the nature of the word, the motivation being that Buddhism, Islam and Christianity had all contributed new words and concepts to the Chinese language and advanced their theological interests in the process. If Jewish Studies and Jewish worldviews were to be in a position to challenge or discourse with these ideas, alternative paradigms and conceptions had to be relayed into the Chinese language, with emphasis on different points. Of course, where the terms and meanings

were acceptable there was no need to propose alternatives, but where a lot hinged on the conception of the divine, or divine characteristics, the presence of Jewish Studies and Jewish methodology should not be hampered by terminology that may inherently go against its grain.

The following are some brief considerations regarding the translation of God's name in light of Jewish Studies research, although this subject requires a lot more attention.

According to the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, the pronunciation of God's name sounds close to the word "Jehovah" (耶和華 Yé hé huá).

In recent academic papers relating to Jewish Studies, a preference has developed to use the term sounding like Yahweh (雅威 Yǎ wēi, or 雅赫威 Yǎ hè wēi).

In class I was more inclined to translate YHWH according to its grammatical implications and usage in the Bible; hence the characters for past (往), present (今), future (来), together with the character for master, order or lord (主). Hence we produced a new name for YHWH being 往今来主 (Wǎng jīn lái zhǔ).

A general Chinese word for God is 往今来神 (Wǎng jīn lái shén) (shortened to 神).

The term referring to the gods in ancient Chinese folk religions and in Daoism is 往今来仙 (Wǎng jīn lái xiān) (shortened to 仙).

The character for "being", which also means "yes", is also referred to as a name of God (往今来是. Wǎng jīn lái shì) (shortened to 是).

The character for "existing", which is often translated into English as "being", is also referred to as God: 往今来在 (Wǎng jīn lái zài) (shortened to 在).

The characters for "be/exist" are: 往今来有 (Wǎng jīn lái yǒu) (shortened to 有); its antonym is 无 (wú) (not being/nihilo).

Another name is rendered in the Chinese translation of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible as 自有永有 (Zì yǒu yǒng yǒu): "I am who I am".<sup>73</sup>

At the start of a course I gave on Kabbalistic literature I realized that, given its heavy usage of metaphor and dependence on language, the best way to impart the profundity of the Kabbalistic worldview was to begin translating concepts into Chinese and set down standardized terms to depict its elaborate system. Even though Gershom Scholem's work *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* had been translated into Chinese, the terms used for the *sephira* system and other Kabbalistic metaphors were translated without a deep appreciation of their sources in the Bible, the Talmud and the Midrash, and their implications in other literature and liturgy. A rigorous translation and standardization effort was necessary to ensure that future studies in the corpus of Jewish literature would resonate and calibrate with the study of mysticism, as was intended, through the use of common terms.

Together with my students, we began collecting and collating a list of the main Kabbalistic terms using Scholem's *Major Trends* and Nissim Mindel's translation of Hassidic concepts appended to his translation of *Tanya*. Owing

to the number of terms and their conceptual complexity, we limited our list to major terms. We would discuss these and see how they were used in several texts (although we focused on *Tanya*).

Students would then be asked to consult dictionaries of philosophy and religion, and to discuss the ideas they learned with other scholars of Chinese religion (Daoism and Buddhism in particular) to identify conceptual parallels and to bring back to class several possible translations of terms, which we would again discuss in the next class until we identified and translated a critical mass of terms to begin more fluid study sessions and understand the inter-connectivity within the Kabbalistic prism.

Standardization of terms remains one of the greatest challenges to the translation project of Jewish classics, and as yet standardization and a methodology have not been formalized. Fu Youde is of the general view that the terms should be transliterated to sound like the Hebrew. This is a relatively safe approach as the terms can later be redefined and reviewed by Chinese scholars and interpreted in light of more informed understanding of the subject. However, the Chinese transliteration and pronunciation are different from the Hebrew, and the terms end up sounding different from their Hebrew origin. In addition, Chinese characters that sound like the Hebrew and mean something reasonably similar to the subject need to be chosen. The task of choosing these characters continues to lack systemization. In any case, for this approach to work, a definition of the terms in light of Jewish scholarship should accompany its transliterated usage.

Over several years I began building a database of Chinese–Hebrew cultural, theological and philosophical terms. It is far from complete, and owing to lack of resources is presently defunct. To complete this, perhaps lifetime, project and to achieve a reasonable integration and steady flow of cultural information in Chinese, a suitable Chinese scholar or team of scholars is required to standardize the above-mentioned terms and ensure their usage in the continuous and unchecked translation process as well as to develop a translation methodology suitable for this project.

## **A critique of the translation process**

When a text is chosen for translation, it is because it is perceived to be an important or representative piece of Jewish culture. The translation is likely to serve as a standard and reference for other writers, academics, thinkers, philosophers and analysts. Mistakes and distortions in them have the potential to put into motion a domino effect of continued misunderstandings amongst the educated and informed readers, who, through no fault of their own, were supplied with misguided frames of reference.

Various reasons exist for the mistakes and carelessness in translation, including the university system, which supplies graduate students to their professors as cheap labor which cannot always be supervised. The predilection amongst students in general, and Chinese culture in particular, for copying without



necessarily understanding or verifying its validity is also a reason for the perpetuation of mistakes. The pictographic-ideographic nature of Chinese characters, and how they grappled with defining foreign phenomena and the difficulty of inventing new words outside the familiarity of the Chinese character system, is without doubt a challenge that translation methodology needs to navigate.

There exist substantial cultural obstacles for scholars educated in a non-Bible-based culture understanding conceptually different ideas. The presence of Christianity, and its effort to present itself as the sole representative of biblical truth, has somewhat compounded this problem. Terms used in the context of Christian pedagogy may not be useful in relaying Jewish ideas, even if in English and other languages the terms are the same. For example, words such as “God”, “Messiah”, “spirit”, “good”, “evil” and other terms used by both religions carry entirely different connotations which, once rendered into Chinese characters, may lend it strong and unshakeable Christian frames of reference.

The willingness of potential translators with little knowledge or background in a subject to embark on translating texts is a character trait generously extant in China – whether it emerges from a naïve misunderstanding of the significance of the words and the implications that misguided translation can have for other systems, or from a form of arrogance that it can be done as it was intended or even better than the author intended. Furthermore, a lack of concern for the consequences, or a lack of interest in the subject and a belief that the choice of words and the subtleties do not really make a difference, is hard to know and probably depends on the people themselves.

At present not a few Jewish works are being translated which cannot possibly render an accurate depiction of their meaning without intensive appreciation of the terms, their commentaries, histories and debate surrounding them.

The sooner the translation process develops a methodology, systemizes Jewish-related terms, makes a distinction between the Christian interpretations and systemizes the skills of translators against the texts they translate, the sooner the course towards fixing mistakes can be taken. It is possible that this degree of academic precision is not required in China and does not serve the needs of the Chinese public. Perhaps general introductions and basic ideas are all that China seeks from the Jewish experience. If this is not so, and academic competency is the objective, the process of correction of errors will have to become an important component of Jewish Studies to attend to the many misconceptions, distortions and perspectives that have already entered the Chinese language and consciousness.

Students of Jewish Studies will need to develop a more critical judgment and an ability rigorously to compare texts and translations. Owing to the vast amount of material being translated into Mandarin, the process of ensuring that ideas and cultural mors are relayed into the Chinese language as accurately as possible will be laborious.

As errors and misconceptions about Jews and Judaism are increasingly identified, as discussion ensues about how mistakes of these proportions were permitted to occur, and as it becomes increasingly apparent that the Jewish characteristics of authors which have been omitted either purposely or innocently are necessary for a complete understanding of the texts they wrote, students and scholars will begin to question the foundations of former generations of scholars and re-examine their work and refine their techniques.

As noted previously, it may still take several decades to fix the mistakes committed by careless translations.

### **Pedagogical challenges**

Jewish and Chinese pedagogical development occurred differently, each respectively emerging from different attitudes to authority, to the status of the teacher; to the role of the student, to the function and application of the material learned, and to values attributed to the material.

The study and teaching of Jewish-related subjects in China comes with its own unique pedagogical tests and opportunities.

Some of these have already been addressed above. The challenges include bridging the language and conceptual gulf between East and West and between European and Semitic languages and the Chinese character system. The absence of deep monotheistic, biblical, Christian or Islamic influences in Chinese history and mentality, together with its non-participation in or identification with European, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern and American history, is a testimony to the potency of foreign pedagogy in general, as much as for Jewish pedagogical theory in its appeal and discourse with the “otherly” nature of the Chinese student.

In order to optimize the educational experience, the non-religious, non-doctrinal, non-devotional components of Jewish pedagogy need to be sought, and the nexus between the student and the educator identified.

Landing within China’s educational reality, as a part of a government program to “open up” and build knowledge bases in the wider humanities and in international cultures, Jewish Studies has had little time to adapt to the disciplines on to which it has been grafted. Accommodating or navigating this adjustment is the challenge for Jewish pedagogical theory in China.

The obvious question to ask is whether Jewish Studies can be taught to non-Jews? Does it hold an appeal outside theological and historical settings? Is familiarity with the Bible and cultural empathy with the Jewish people’s history in Europe and the Middle East a necessary factor of its appeal?

Dr Shalom Salomon Wald, on behalf of the Jerusalem-based Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, runs a research project entitled “Enhancing the Standing of the Jewish People in Emerging Superpowers without Biblical Traditions”. The name of the project suggests his view that different tools and methodologies are necessary in nurturing a cultural repertoire with nations without biblical or monotheistic cultural associations, such as China, India

and Japan. He describes the basic opportunities and challenges for Jewish organizations and interests as follows:

... free of anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist prejudices ... shared interests may become increasingly important in the 21st century ... help create a long-term cultural foundation for understanding and cooperation, identify opportunities for furthering mutual knowledge of the cultures and national heritage of the Jewish people and the peoples of the respective countries.

Indeed, on the face of it, the absence of anti-Jewish sentiments fermented in Christian and Islamic countries, and the absence of resentment towards Jews born of circumstantial, theological and social reasons, seems like a refreshing new slate on which to generate fresh inter-civilizational dynamics, and re-create a non-tainted representation of Jewish peoplehood amongst some of Asia's emerging superpowers. However, in their splendid ignorance and dis-attachment from Judaism's historical incubator in Europe and the Middle East, its study lacks many levels of relevance and cultural resonance.

From my own experiences teaching students, many of whom were members of the Chinese Communist Party, educated in the polite dismissal of religion, sharing virtually no cultural affinity with biblical literature, personalities, names, concepts and beliefs, many of whom had never read the Bible, or been exposed to biblical stories, or been immersed in European languages, the sensation of teaching Hebrew Bible and Jewish religion was entirely different from that of teaching Christians, Muslims or students in Western countries. The difficulty in evoking sentiments drawn from biblical allusions and terminology is palpable. The absence of prejudices for or against Jewish themes, which in a Christian environment may have served as a sounding board for discussion, debate or the formation of new ideas, has no place or appeal in the Chinese classroom.

Misperceptions cannot be challenged or questioned when Western religion is innocently presumed to be an opiate, or is seen in anthropological terms. The Chinese student could not possibly be expected to appreciate the profound influence of the Bible, monotheism and the Jewish experience on the Western imagination.

Indeed, there are distinct obstacles on the way to evoking a sense of profundity and empathy amongst a student body with little discourse and cultural intercourse with monotheistic spirituality.

Pedagogical success in these circumstances requires the teacher to create different pedagogical paradigms for the material or draw from other familiar frames of references to lend the material conceivability. The fascination with Jews has often come from references to anti-Semitism, which Chinese do not seem to have yet experienced.

We see efforts to formulate frames of reference relating to Jews in terms of money and power which, as mentioned above, have appealed to the

popular Chinese imagination and sold tens of thousands of books. Genocide and Holocaust Studies also evoked empathy and pedagogical opportunities. Students of Western philosophy, history and literature are increasingly developing an appreciation for the inter-textual resonance between biblical and European literature. The will to apply lessons of Jewish history and thought to modern China has also been discussed as a motive in the study of Judaism. But, for students of Chinese culture and thought, Jewish Studies carries little meaning or significance and little access point to ferment discourse. Teaching Judaism within a purely Chinese frame of reference remains a theoretical and practical challenge to the few who view Jewish pedagogy in China as a worthy pursuit.

Indeed, the Chinese have excelled in extracting the humanistic qualities of Jewish Studies, and even found other original applications. The achievements in Jewish Studies thus far have been accomplished with little attention to or interest in faith, doctrine and spirituality – as a personal pursuit of the scholar. In contrast to Western scholars of theology, who have a vested interest by virtue of their faith in the Bible, this does not appear to be a factor in the present constituency of Chinese Jewish Studies scholars. For the most part, they are animated and perhaps charmed by the sociological, interpretive, contextual and human components of their studies, but are not doctrinally inspired.

During my tenure teaching in China I tried a number of different techniques to instill interest in the material and fascination in the dynamics at work in Jewish intellectual spheres.

I experimented with various possibilities – for example, forming a traditional Jewish study pair (*chevruta*), in which a rabbinic text would be studied, analyzed and debated. I tried to convey a sense of responsibility of the student for the performance of his/her study partner, and tried to encourage debate amongst them, urged them to challenge the other and what he/she was reading, tried to show them how to argue a contradiction and reconcile it in a Talmudic study fashion. Chinese are disinclined to this practice, preferring individual study by rote, preferring a search for harmony in the text over faults and flaws, and not being concerned or feeling responsible for their classmates. The *chevruta* trial did not work easily.

During classes, I offered incentives and extra marks for students who would challenge me, who would argue with me, who would find a basis from the material I taught to refute my conclusions. This goes against the grain of the Chinese study ethic: and, although changing, until the concepts of knowledge, authority and the hierarchical status of the teacher are profoundly reshaped, the basic non-challenging dynamic in the Chinese classroom is unlikely to change markedly.

Teaching or encouraging “religious” practice or thought is not accepted in China; and, while the university system is a lot more open, and students of philosophy and religion especially are almost mandated to be exposed to these ideas, there are limitations on religious pedagogy. The courses are not

overly censored, although self-censorship is expected of teachers. It is unlikely that these students would be drawn into the spirituality of Western religious thought, considering their training, the stigma associated with it, the expectations on them to be defenders of their own atheist tradition, their ambitions to teach or work within the university or bureaucratic system – difficult, were they to be doctrinally biased. Many courses are taught by Christian missionaries and they are often attended for several main reasons: an opportunity for students to learn English; they have sympathy for missionaries who are perceived as being kind, caring and warm-hearted; their courses are often accompanied by field trips and treats funded by the teachers or the organizations that support them; possibilities exist for scholarships and study abroad for good students.

There is rarely strong opposition to the conveyance of religious thought or principles. At best there is a passive, polite indifference to ideas being presented. I conducted surveys and questionnaires of students regarding their impressions of Christian missionaries who came to teach and their openness to the attempt to convey their theology and faith to them. While in Western classrooms there may have been debate, even anger at this, in China it was accepted and respected. Students would not be averse to participating in anything the teacher requested, and entertaining the idea of God and even speaking in theological terms as if believers, for the duration of the class, then would find little problem in continuing to another, different, class and doing the same even if contradictory.

The notion of exclusivity does not play a large part in Chinese cultural thinking; the plethora of family religions and deities contributes to their tolerance and willingness to “give face” to all of them. They are willing to participate in religious rites out of curiosity and non-binding utilitarianism, hoping at least that it may help them in some way, or bring them luck. The challenges to monotheistic religions which teach exclusivity are therefore more complex. The very notion of exclusivity is an illiberal idea, and so students hold the intellectual upper hand when Western religions are described as demanding unswerving loyalty to a specific doctrine.

None the less, Chinese students are deeply interested in the quest for genuine spirituality and seek spiritual paradigms for daily use. The atheism with which they grew up served to distance them from existing superstitious ideas, although many still refer to these in times of need, and before tests and interviews. They are interested in discovering something mysterious to make their life more interesting or lend them an aura of “otherly” knowledge. They are also interested in spirituality with social applications which can demonstrate usefulness, something going against the grain of most monotheistic spiritualities, which require exclusive loyalty without the expectation of material return.

Chinese students I met and taught seem to be profoundly impressed by demonstrations of passion, generosity, sacrifice and dedication to a cause, which may be the single most effective way to convey an idea and have

them consider it and for them to continue classes on the subject. The more earnest students, beyond marks and job prospects, seek personal example and meaning in their studies, so that religiously inspired teachers have the potential to develop meaningful discourse on their subject, despite the barriers mentioned.

In the case of Judaism, which does not seek to attract religious converts, the challenges are more complex. Students responded with a degree of disappointment upon learning that Judaism is not interested in converting them and even annoyance on understanding that they would not be easily accepted even if they wanted to convert. I bring several quotes relating to this in another chapter where I discuss double standards, whereby Chinese are accustomed to being invited and welcomed into Western intellectual and spiritual systems, which are ideologically based, but do not imagine that foreigners are capable of being – or that it is possible to be – accepted within Chinese cultural systems, which are ethnically based. Judaism, drawing from both systems, confounds the Chinese and perhaps makes them feel uncomfortable to observe how exclusivity works within a system other than its own.

The relationship towards “the other” touches on nerves in the Chinese consciousness and plays a part in developing pedagogical theory. Debate abounds as to the virtues of studying “the other” and about foreign culture, or whether it is sufficient to study China and Chinese culture, which has enough material to fill a lifetime and is, in the nationalist’s eyes, more than enough to become an enlightened person.

I tried to show that, in understanding how a civilization such as Judaism and the Jews functioned, the Chinese gained insight into the “quintessential other” and that there was no greater intellectual exercise than achieving this. While showing similarities between Jewish and Chinese culture, so as to not completely estrange them, I nevertheless focused on demonstrating the different ways in which the two civilizations functioned, how they reflected antithetical, polar expressions of society. I emphasized that there was little material reward or few lucrative jobs to be gained from the study of “otherliness”, just insight into something completely different, which was the goal of the student in general and of the philosopher in particular.

Given the cultural deference to harmony, I remain unsure if demonstrating difference is a stable foundation on which to base inter-cultural pedagogy, but my efforts to show that “the other” also fits into the broader scheme of harmony paid off; and, after the students understood the basis of my teaching, important insights and discussions ensued, with positive results throughout the semesters and years.

In the course of these comparisons and contrasts, we discussed different perceptions of justice, different concepts of society, different religious and cultural rites (mourning, prayer, respect, comparative festivals and calendars, comparative rituals and rites, holidays, relations with friends, concepts of study, attitude towards money and the material world). I presented Biblical

Studies as theory of social justice, the championing of law and order and the protection of the weak, and discussed how the Chinese treat the weak and how socialism ensures equality and social justice. We discussed how the Bible engendered the emergence of Marxism, and how Jewish life has given birth to ideological and intellectual systems which are different from itself. I felt that, as Judaism was demonstrated to have expressed itself in Marxism, atheism, universalism and other facets of life different from itself, the relationship between harmony and difference became more tangible. The concluding sentiments may have been the sense of mutual sympathy, mutual otherliness and mutual respect.

Despite learning about Jewish practice, it is hard to imagine how the Sabbath, festivals or other Jewish rites occur in reality. I made the point of inviting students to my home, letting them participate in the Sabbath, learning Hebrew songs and participating in other Jewish rites – for example, observing the building of the *succa*, observing how *tephilin* are used, immersion as much as possible within the limits of Chinese and Jewish law and the limits of mutual cultures. The personal and experiential dimensions have important pedagogical implications, but go beyond the mandate of the university system and are not necessarily implementable in university pedagogy.

Another pedagogical avenue I tried is the implementation of online courses. We developed ties with Baltimore Hebrew College online Hebrew-language courses. Students enjoyed the relative interactivity and the opportunity to make friends around the world. The potential for online courses is vast and growing as the internet becomes the medium for relaying information and education in China; it requires the training of scholars who can supervise and oversee the process. However, rapid progress in the study of Hebrew I discovered was possible by taking advantage of Chinese students' often phenomenal memory, to teach them grammar and vocabulary by heart, and use the authority of the teacher to ensure that they completed their homework in a timely fashion. Though draconian, the results were good. The downside to this is the boredom and lack of interest associated with learning Hebrew, and the negative effect of forcing Hebrew study on a student population who find little practical use and relevance for the subject, few opportunities to speak and little understanding of the cultural associations of Hebrew. The prospect of learning Hebrew may be one of the disincentives of graduate students choosing Jewish Studies. Curiously, this same dilemma faced early centuries of Jews who struggled to impart the body and form of the Jewish tradition by way of the Hebrew language, or the principles of the culture in the form of its universal appeal. This question remains one to be negotiated.

So far as Hebrew is a basis of Jewish pedagogy, it will be difficult to attract large numbers of students. If Hebrew is not part of a syllabus, it will be impossible to nurture leading scholars. The alternative is a two-tracked syllabus, one for Jewish thought, history, ideas and culture, the other for Jewish texts and analysis.



### **Jewish Studies collaborations within other disciplines**

The broad scope of Jewish Studies discussed above does not lend itself to be taught in one single department. This would be neither practical nor wise. Rather, Jewish Studies courses could be integrated within a variety of departments, research institutes, schools and syllabi.

For example, subjects relating to Jewish history could be incorporated in the syllabus of history departments – European Jewry in European history, American Jewry in American history, Chinese Jewry in Chinese history. Subjects relating to Jewish law could be incorporated in the department of law, subjects relating to Jewish philosophy in the department of philosophy, subjects relating to Jewish sociology in the department of sociology, and so on.

The problem with this is that Chinese scholars and lecturers are often unable to offer insights into these subjects because they have no background in or understanding of them. Presently there is a number of major Chinese academic institutions dedicated to Jewish Studies that could be used to train and supplement the education of Chinese scholars across many research disciplines. Intense summer schools, research grants and fellowships can be offered to develop the cross-fertilization of their research interests with corresponding subjects in the Jewish experience. The Center for Judaic and Inter-Religious Studies in Shandong University's Department of Philosophy and Social Development is ideally geared to lead the way in this exchange initiative.

Similar programs can be designed for Chinese policy-makers to inform them of the Jewish experience with regard to minority planning, education strategy, family cohesion, and other instructive subjects which have the potential to develop relations between Chinese people and Jewish scholars.

In addition, many scholars of a broad range of disciplines not connected directly with Judaism happen to be Jews and in many ways influenced by their Jewish culture. These people may also be interested in giving of their expertise within a framework of an intellectual and cultural exchange with China. Many such scholars have written to me personally with an interest in teaching their subjects in China, informed by Jewish-related issues. The exchange between Jewish and Chinese scientists and business interests can be effected on a cultural-exchange level, affording them opportunity, mutual interests and friendly associations conducive to better professional relationships. In addition it would be wise to encourage exchange programs for Chinese to go to Jewish Studies departments and other departments around the world and in Israel to learn and teach, as Jews and Israelis should come to China to study and teach in areas associated with Jewish subjects or subjects of mutual sociointellectual interest.

As Jewish-related subjects are grafted onto existing disciplines, the exchange of information and ideas between Chinese and Jewish scholars across diverse fields of intellectual and cultural pursuits can be cultivated. Such exchange can enhance the understanding of their respective philosophies,

cultures, civilizations, religion and thought, lead to a cross-fertilization of ideas and generally complement many diverse research areas within the Humanities. Of course the horizons for friendships and academic networks between Chinese and foreign scholars of Jewish background are also significant.

Areas of cross-disciplinary collaboration can include: Religion, Culture and Thought in the Ancient World; World Diasporas and Their Significance; Religious Fundamentalism; Major Jewish Intellectuals; Study of Major Western Religions; Development of New World Philosophies; Philosophy of Science; Music and Ethnomusicology; Standards of Justice and Law; Linguistics and Human Society; Exploring Modern Political Theories; Woman in Human Society; Ethics of Dying Death, and Mourning; Medical Ethics; Genocide and War; Religion and Psychiatry; Emerging Economics and Political Theories.

If ever there were a people who traded in ideas and “intellectual technology”, the Jewish people are arguably it. Scholars of Jewish origin, whether actively or loosely identified as Jews, represent a cross-section of even larger bodies of knowledge. Jewish Studies, though of an entirely different composition, owing to its inter-disciplinary nature, also spans regions, races, political, ideological, cultural and language groups, making the discipline a nimble carrier of applicable information. The ever-developing and adaptive body of Jewish Studies and corps of Jewish scholars have served as proverbial pollinators between antithetical ideas, synthesizing them and forming a creative dialectic. The engagement of Jews in Chinese Studies and the interaction of Chinese intellectuals with Jewish Studies and with Jewish intellectuals have a good chance of forming the basis for a larger dialectical arch, on the outcome of which only scholars of the future can speculate.

### **The emergence of Jewish–Chinese relations as an academic discipline**

Judaism has engaged in dialogue and exchange and referential interpretation of texts and thought with most of the great civilizations and cultures of the world. From the Babylonians to the Greeks, the Romans to the Spanish, Russians, Germans and Americans, Jewish thought has influenced and been influenced by Christianity and Islam, by the movements of democracy, capitalism and socialism, and by the scientific and most recently the technological revolutions. Jewish theologians/rabbis and philosophers have interacted with and interpreted geo-political circumstance and intellectual vogues, and used these to view and understand Judaism. Through these continually developing paradigms Judaism is observed and analyzed by other peoples, from different cultures, and new intellectual processes are appraised accordingly.

The continual recalibration of Jewish thought by this exchange with major civilizational trends keeps it in good stead when under scrutiny and observation, and has made Jewish life an almost representative process

in major nations and cultures. Despite small numbers and the absence of sovereignty, the success of Judaism in surviving and contributing to world civilization may arguably be attributed to these dynamics of engagement. Hence disciplines such as the study of Jews in diaspora countries – Roman, Spanish, Babylonian, American, and so on – intersect the countries' major currents from economy, politics, religion, architecture, music, scientific accomplishment, and so on. There are also disciplines which embrace the relations between civilizations, such as Jewish–Islamic relations, Jewish Christian relations, and so on. There are, however, a number of regions where the study and research of the engagement of Judaism is sorely lacking.

The absence of a dialogue with the religions, philosophies, cultures and people of Southeast Asia is the most glaring. Not to say that Judaism was not until now engaged with these regions or capable of synthesis with their cultures; it simply had few and irregular opportunities to do so, and has been interrupted by historical events and revolutions.

In the specific case of China, the Jewish presence in Kaifeng for over a thousand years arguably underwent an important synthesis and dialogue with Chinese thought and culture. The Baghdadi Jews who settled in mid-nineteenth century Hong Kong and Shanghai, the Russian Jews who settled in Harbin in the 1910s, and the German Jews who settled in Shanghai in the 1930s began an important Chinese–Jewish dialogue which may have bloomed into another unique trans-cultural model had the traumatic rise of the People's Republic and the subsequent Cultural Revolution and isolation of China not slowed this process down by fifty years.

Over the last eight to ten years the Jewish communities of these regions have begun to grow; the economic boom of China has brought an increasing number of Jews to its major cities. The exchange of culture and thought takes longer to take root; and, as trade and professional training and diplomacy expand, the cultural and intellectual horizons are also better-positioned to progress with it. This has extended into artistic cooperation, films, art, writing and translation. Other areas of exchange in environmentalism, feminism and other sub-fields are also being explored.

As Jewish Studies engages wider disciplines, it becomes endowed with new vistas and opportunities for fertile intercourse. In inter-civilizational discourse, the two engaging parties mutually inform one another of their underlying symbolic worlds. The final uses that each symbolic world has for the other is far from view, but the raw material for fertile intercourse is evident. These have not yet been understood within the discipline of Jewish–Chinese relations, but the niche has been formed and as it grows will necessitate the adoption of this perspective, too.

The more uses to which Jewish Studies lends itself within a Chinese context, the more its referential value to other civilizations will be understood. The development of Jewish Studies in China and the nurturing of a Judeo-Chinese socio-intellectual discourse helps expand its scope. The way some of its components are interpreted within other national contexts illuminates

areas of Judaism the universal appeal of Judaism, and suggests more disciplines that could be developed using its ideas within an inter-cultural framework. Given the enormity of the Chinese scholarly body, a Sino-Judaic academic axis has the potential to engage relatively large numbers of Jewish scholars, to lead them to new fields of collaboration, and to form new intellectual and cultural paradigms.

Dialogue and intellectual exchange with Asia provides great vistas for Jewish Studies, new partners for discussion, opportunity to remodel and fuse ideas. Jewish scholars would be tantalized by the challenges raised by dialogue with the Chinese reality, with subjects such as national atheism, Confucianism, concepts of morality, feminism, capitalism and socialism, human rights, concepts of territory, diaspora, and so on. It also provides opportunities for students and scholars wishing to combine interests in Asia and Judaism.

Because of the entirely different axis around which Jews and Chinese civilizational characteristics revolve, and because of their respectively unique characteristics and skills, if a relationship was nurtured between two of the oldest intact civilizations on earth, it could be unusually complementary, fusing perspectives, skills and dynamics, sharing each other's experiences in a mutually complementary relationship. The socio-intellectual dimensions of a possible relationship, as opposed to an economic-geo-political alliance, work in different ways and unfold over different timeframes.

There have been significant attempts in the past to synthesize Eastern religious systems with Judaism. The development of Lourianic Kabbalah may arguably be attributed to the Eastern influences of Buddhism and Daoism picked up by Jewish traders of the Silk Road fused with Persian religious influence combined within a unique Jewish perspective permeating and guiding its application. There has been considerable engagement among American Jews in the spiritual teachings of Buddhism. Jews, who make up 2 percent of the population, account for some 30 percent of non-Asian American Buddhists. The fusion of Jewish-Chinese culture and thought has many other tangents to run.

As the political tides turn, as China becomes one of the most important and powerful civilizations on earth, as it reinterprets its political currents and develops "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" and turns to economic rationalism, its concern for religious thought has not subsided. The friendship between Tibetan Buddhism and some Jewish activists and religious thinkers represents a no-go area for the development of Jewish-Chinese relations. Judaism is left with hard-to-identify intellectual fibers with which to communicate with China.

There are considerably important features about the Chinese experience that scholars of Judaism may be more favorably disposed to understand and incorporate into their own discourse. Just as Jewish thinkers and thinkers of Jewish origin have fused the experiences of other nations and even been conduits for the dissemination of Greco-Roman, German, American philosophical and political traditions, a proportionately high number of scholars

of Jewish origin have excelled and continue to excel in sinology, some considered the leaders in their field.

Together with significant obstacles to dialogue and exchange, there are also several distinctly favorable conditions for a strong and fruitful contemporary intellectual exchange between Judaism and Chinese culture. The obstacles include: the absence of God from the lexicon of the Chinese; a completely different language system with different characters and interpretive models; absence of a biblical culture and common literary and cultural icons and points of reference; different calendars, perception of time, history and eras.

The favorable conditions include: only sporadic historical engagement without tension or conflict; antithetical axes ready to be fused; mutual respect. Opportunities abound for comparison and contrast. Observing how a non-monotheistic and non-Bible-oriented civilization relates to Jews and Judaism is instructive. Comparing ethical and intellectual paradigms and relating them to respective religious and theistic axioms may indicate what correlations exist between ideas and civilizational patterns. Judaism may also contain more suitable religio-cultural characteristics to complement a fertile dialogue with China and serve as a bridge and an *avant-garde* medium with inherent advantages in interpreting and understanding over other non-Asian cultures. The relations between secular Judaism and Marxism also have many interesting and exciting intellectual vistas worth exploring.

As the embryonic beginnings of a Judeo-Chinese sociointellectual exchange of ideas and culture matures, its trajectory may rise to the heights of synergy experienced in some of the most prosperous eras of Judaism. It is worth beginning to view Jewish–Chinese relations as a discipline deserving independent study.

## **Arguments for and against Jewish Studies in China**

Even though Judaism, with some modifications, could be a very attractive spiritual alternative for Chinese, running the gamut of the scholarly, middle and peasant classes, appealing to their desire for a spiritual calling, a stable and profound ethical structure, a just social system, honest and healthy family structures, none the less there are few signs or possibilities that Judaism will ever take root in China as a spiritual movement, owing to the lack of necessary components to generate critical mass.

Even though Buddhism, Islam, Christianity and Marxism entered China from foreign lands, and all succeeded in establishing themselves as important spiritual, ideological and cultural systems, Judaism has various internal mechanisms which make it unlikely to proliferate in this way.

Apart from the limitations on the part of Chinese law, one of the most curious hurdles to Jewish pedagogy in China is the hesitancy of Jews to teach Judaism outside a Jewish environment. Judaism is generally averse to seeing Jewish religious rites practiced by non-Jews, and few Jews are motivated to spread their religion to those who are not born Jewish. None the less, despite

this relatively broad consensus, there are variations of opinion on the way to share Judaism in a non-religious cultural format.

In addition, being that there is only a small Jewish community in China, and minimal symbiosis between Judaism and Chinese culture, little cultural or day-to-day motivation exists for Jewish involvement in the Chinese education system or in promoting Jewish Studies in China. Jewish Studies has traditionally been taught in an environment of ritual practice and religious devotion. From a Jewish point of view, as evangelism or outreach to non-Jews is not desirable, and devotional learning is not an option within the atheist-socialist framework of Chinese universities, a certain inertia underlies this wing of the Jewish-Chinese nexus.

Holocaust Studies is supported by some international and local bodies, and by passionate Jews and Chinese in and out of China who view its study as an important universal theme necessary to promote in China. The Israeli embassy also nurtures cultural exchanges in Israel and Hebrew Studies as part of the China-Israel diplomatic agreements, including Hebrew language and literature. The hope that Jewish history and literature can be meaningful and also nurture tolerance and understanding of Jews is welcomed by international Jewish organizations.

The contextualization of Jewish issues within a Chinese context has delighted and fascinated many universally oriented Jews, for example within the Reform Movement, whose members hear about the developments of Jewish Studies in China with delight. For secular and academic Jews, the prospect of Jewish Studies being taught at universities around the world is a welcome development; but, owing to their lack of familiarity with Jewish texts and their lack of involvement in Chinese affairs, their interest has little impact on the reality. In many ways Jewish Studies in China appeals to the universal drive of many secular Jews who wish to share some lessons of Jewish life but not evangelize its doctrine or assert a sense of religious belonging to Gentiles. Many secular Jews themselves identify with Judaism through the study of Jewish culture, history, historiography, not through faith or theology.

In many respects, the synthesis of Judaism through Chinese academia is a perfect compromise, a recognition of Judaism as a world spiritual-intellectual entity, on the one hand, while laying down the conditions to build a well-founded, mature way towards meaningful dialogue, on the other, while not punctuating the religious theological component, which is uncomfortable for both nations. This dynamic is mutually edifying. On the one hand, Jews enjoy seeing Judaism being recognized as a universal subject of interest and study; on the other hand, Chinese feel that foreign ideologies should undergo a form of sinicization, i.e. "Jewish Studies with Chinese characteristics", as deference to the Chinese tradition. The relationship in theoretical terms shares harmonious and mutually complementary fundamentals. However, there are few proponents driving Jewish Studies and no clear intellectual genesis for the subject, leaving it stranded in a kind of circumstantial vacuum.

Orthodox are the least happy about teaching Jewish doctrine to non-Jews, believing that it is a waste of time and that the Chinese would ridicule Jewish faith, have no appreciation for the relationship between man and God, or the notion of the soul and the profound relation that Jews have with the Torah and the commandments. They would treat it cynically and eventually use it against Jews, and there is no benefit in sharing the Jewish treasure with those who are bound to reject it. Even the prospects of teaching Chinese about monotheism, the existence of God, which is a commandment incumbent on religious Jews (generally referred to as the “seven laws of Noah”), is met with hesitancy. Some orthodox (Hasidic) Jews who do business in China suggested securing permission from rabbinic judges and saintly rabbis before embarking on such a far-reaching program.

The ultra-orthodox feel that there is little to be gained from the Chinese experience other than to buy merchandise and sell it. Despite living in China or visiting regularly, they maintain cordial but distant relations with their Chinese hosts and do not participate in any avoidable aspects of Chinese life or culture, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

The Chabad movement, which outreaches to Jews around the world and has a strong presence in China, is not prepared to teach or accept Chinese into its synagogues or religious events owing to a combination of promises made to the Chinese authorities to not be involved in evangelical work and its own lack of interest in teaching Gentiles. Chinese who are married to Jews are sometimes an exception to this rule. I once found myself in the uncomfortable situation of inviting my students to the synagogue in Beijing and being politely asked to take them out as the rabbi had made undertakings to the Chinese authorities to not accept Chinese citizens into any of the community’s events.

To a large extent, secularism reduced these obstacles, but they have not disappeared entirely. With the evolution of academic institutions in the West, Jewish Studies is being fostered by secular, often non-Jewish academics; none the less it cannot exist in complete isolation from Jewish scholars and their participation in the university system and in informing the students of Jewish practices and wisdom. Religious Jewish academics are some of the most excited and active in developing the reasoning and the material most suited for Jewish–Chinese intellectual exchange. Their love for and dedication to the material, and their ability to identify its usefulness within the Chinese prism and to teach it within a non-doctrinal framework, while appreciating its spiritual value, too, together with their willingness to collaborate with Chinese academics, is the major force behind its ability to function. Collaboration with international universities is often made possible via the enthusiasm of these scholars.

## **A strategic asset**

In the past, national churches were active in representing national interests and the “soft power” of their countries throughout the world via evangelism,



immigration and colonialism, hence the Roman Catholic, Greek, Russian, Armenian Orthodox churches, the Church of England, and so on, have developed religious followings throughout many countries of the world. Modern secular frameworks for the formalization of national interests are manifest in embassy and consulate representation, with another politically correct way to extend influence and exchange finding expression through cultural institutes such as the British Council, the *Alliance Française*, the Russian Culture Center, the American Peace Corps and recently the Chinese Confucian Institutes.<sup>74</sup>

The Jewish people, for complex reasons, have had mixed degrees of influence and exposure via the aegis of host countries, via the achievements of Jewish persons in the diverse lands, and due to the seminal influence of Judaism on Christianity and Islam. But, before the establishment of the modern State of Israel, Judaism did not have formal or institutional representation or a voice representing exchange and discourse of its culture and interests.

For reasons discussed above, Jewish leaders refrained from extending their religious influence, and only with the advent of secularism have the prospects for civilized exchanges become increasingly viable. In many respects Jewish Studies programs are the vehicles and instruments of Jewish national interest. Its role in bridging the cultural divide and furnishing the tools for meaningful dialogue with the Chinese is exemplary. Though not entirely attuned to the will and political interests of the state of Israel, none the less, as a cultural medium, it is important for Israeli diplomatic interests, too.

It is conceivable that in the coming decades China's universities could employ hundreds of lecturers and professors over its thousands of institutions of higher education, to teach some aspects in the expanse of Jewish-related subjects from history, sociology, language, theology, politics, philosophy, culture, musicology and so on. If, as mentioned, the Hebrew Bible is endorsed as a subject for optional (or compulsory) study, this would necessitate hundreds or thousands of teachers who could take short courses in this subject at centers for Jewish Studies. If the fusion of Jewish subjects with other disciplines continues, and if every university in the country had one lecturer in some area related to Jewish Studies, this would also warrant the training of hundreds or perhaps thousands of teachers and researchers. Today the United States celebrates a plethora of Jewish Studies programs available at its universities, such that it is inconceivable that any reputable college would not offer at least one course or lecture in an area related to the Jewish experience. One may recall that half a century ago this was far from the present reality. Tomorrow China may champion Jewish Studies with the same zeal as many of the great nations of the world have done in the past. The possibility for Jewish teachers and writers to be employed in China would be significant, and this would in turn enhance the status of Jewish Studies in universities around the world, where graduates could be sure of employment, or combine Jewish and Asian studies and interests.

The interests for modern Israel extend to long-term economic strategy. Being small in size and population, Israeli leaders extol the need to excel as a source of intellectual property and innovative standards, as educators and a source of knowledge, while nurturing relations with nations more able to implement its originality, technological breakthroughs and innovations on a large scale warranting and financing the model. The complementary relationship between Israel and China, which seeks this infusion of multicultural, multidisciplinary input, is self-evident.

## **Future directions**

Several steps are necessary to advance Jewish Studies in China. These include:

1. Establishing a Chinese National Association of Jewish Studies that can unite and coordinate all the centers of Jewish Studies and scholars into a framework that promotes higher academic standards
2. Correct translation protocols
3. Online information access and databases
4. Libraries and research resources
5. Regulating and assisting international exchanges between overseas organizations and scholars
6. Managing the sharing of visiting international scholars; presenting a united front for fund-raising and grant application procedures
7. Lobbying for and supporting the continued deepening of Jewish Studies in China; assisting and enhancing the employment opportunities of Jewish Studies scholars in China, reinforcing it as an attractive discipline to pursue.

The establishment of such an association has, until the present, not been permitted by the national authorities, who are wary of national unions and organizations which may wield too much cross-provincial influence. It is conceivable, however, that with efforts locally and abroad this will be permitted, if the reasoning and support for it is demonstrated as being in the national interest.

Another issue relates to the establishment of a national center for Jewish Studies. In his 2004 strategy paper, Dr Shalom Salomon Wald suggests that a center for Jewish Studies be established at one of the nation's leading universities in Beijing, the seat of the nation's power, where its influence on major Chinese thinkers and scholars can be maximized.<sup>75</sup> His proposal came months before Shandong University was formally selected to be the academic home of the nation's major center for Jewish Studies. The argument for a center in Beijing is strong, and it is indeed worthwhile trying to develop one and nurturing ties with Beijing intellectuals. But the reality of its activities in Jinan, capital of Shandong Province, is irreversible. The choice of location in the home province of Confucius and Mencius and home of leading

Chinese intellectuals, poets and writers, too, the cultural Mecca of Qufu, in Shandong Province, makes it a suitable region for this process to take root. From a less conspicuous base, Jewish Studies can build a stable infrastructure and solid credentials to work its way into mainstream Chinese academia.

Owing to the lack of strong Jewish institutional support for these initiatives, the mobilization of resources and funding is slow in coming but will be necessary if the far-reaching goals identified by Dr Wald and others are to be achieved. A number of funding priorities are necessary, including:

1. Generous support of Chinese scholars to attend Israeli universities, Jewish Studies institutes and centers
2. Funds to support writing and translation of academic and popular works into Chinese
3. Funds to develop a translation database and methodology
4. Support of cultural projects and media to extend the significance of Jewish-related themes via the internet, audio-visual, movie, theater and scripts, musicals, databases and libraries
5. Support of Jewish scholars to teach and research in China
6. Support for the establishment of a China-wide association of Jewish Studies
7. Funds to develop inter-disciplinary programs between Jewish Studies and other cultural and humanistic studies as well as between Jews and Chinese scholars, artists, writers, musicians, and so on
8. Funds to build a state-of-the-art interactive website and databases which contain archives, books, articles, bibliographies and other resources in Jewish Studies, which can be accessed in English and Chinese by scholars around China and the world. This could serve as an archive of the histories of the Jews of China and provide information in areas of Jewish philosophy, culture, practice, literature and history, and afford access to databases, online books, manuscripts and journals
9. Resources to develop online courses in Jewish Studies
10. Scholarships to attract first-class PhD candidates from other disciplines who are prepared to begin work in Jewish Studies and develop links in politics, law, philosophy, literature, and so on
11. Managerial resources to lobby and initiate projects to encourage provincial and municipal Departments of Education to recognize, for example, the Hebrew Bible as an important tool for understanding Western civilization, and to develop programs to teach it in high schools.

## **Concluding remarks**

With a historian's appreciation for the feats that time brings in its strides, a sociologist's eye for the assets that each civilization can bring into the synergy, together with the political scientist's acknowledgment that mutual

interest breeds the most sensational and unexpected alliances, the present gulf between reality and fantasy relating to the Jewish and Chinese civilizations is not irreconcilable. In fact the positioning on both sides indicates a readiness to step in the direction of a meaningful embrace.

Many factors remain obstacles, and this process is unlikely, and not necessary to become a priority, but, rather, a natural and slowly moving progression that will last as long as it serves mutual interests and stimulates the respective national imaginations.

In the tenth century, as the golden era of the Jews of Babylon (modern-day Iraq) was coming to an end, a Jewish dignitary of Baghdadi extraction, Hisdai Ibn Shaprut, won high office to the caliph in Cordoba and began bringing Jews from the centers of learning in Baghdad over to Spain to serve as advisors, physicians, scholars, astronomers, writers and poets. He began a large translation project of Jewish classics and the methodical transfer of knowledge from Babylon to Spain. At that time Spain was relatively isolated and had few ties with the rest of Europe, and certainly not with the mainstream Jewish world. This initiative, however, paved the way for one of the most magnificent periods of Jewish civilization, the Golden Age of Spanish Jewry, lasting 700 years and becoming an unforgettable if not irreplaceable component of Jewish identity.

For the hundred years preceding the great Jewish emigrations to the United States, the fledgling Jewish community there was viewed with disdain and contempt, and America was referred to as the *treife medina* (a non-kosher land) by the orthodox establishments of Eastern Europe, who could not imagine that it would one day become a stalwart protector of Jewish culture, one of the greatest centers to have emerged in the Jewish Diaspora, while their own communities would be ravaged and destroyed by Nazism and communism.

The long and winding roads of the Jewish Diaspora have been riddled with surprising turns. The Chinese experience has already demonstrated this; the continual interest of the Chinese, as reflected in their embrace of Jewish Studies, suggests the beginning of a most curious phenomenon. Though the process of cultural exchange has just begun, its trajectory is far from reaching its zenith and may yet prove to reach a high point in the already fascinating Jewish Diaspora experience.

If the Chinese treat the study of the humanities in general and of Jewish subjects in particular as seriously as they build cities, expand their economy and embrace universal knowledge and intellectual infrastructure, then China's contribution to the continual re-interpretation of Judaism within new and changing contexts could dwarf the Jewish experience in medieval Spain, and even that of the United States. That China does not have the same biases towards Jews as did Christian countries may be a powerful factor in assimilating it more readily and minimizing the negative effects. As the Chinese economy grows and China becomes an economic superpower, it is likely that Jewish communities in China will also grow significantly and new ones will appear and flourish, further contributing to the dynamic.

China has already been the home and protector of Jewish communities in despair. Shanghai served as the temporary wartime abode of the Mir Yeshiva, one of Eastern Europe's most prominent Talmudic seminaries, before it relocated after the war to Jerusalem and New York. There are few reasons why China could not be home to a vibrant Jewish community, and why Jewish culture could not thrive as it did in Rome, Spain, Germany, Poland and the United States. There is also no good reason why Jewish culture could not be appreciated by Chinese, as it was adopted by countless cultures via the religious aegis of Christianity and Islam, or via the cultural aegis of the United States.

The historical poetry resulting from the cooperation of two of the oldest civilizations on earth complementing the existence of each other and deriving mutual benefit from the national fabric and social experiences of the other in an intelligent, mutually complementary relationship of two-way gain is a testament to the maturity and intelligence of their cultures, and may yet be a blessing for both nations as they find ways to work together in social cooperation and coordination. The exchange between these two axial civilizations has the potential to form a synthesis between Confucian and Jewish ideas which could lay down the foundations of a long and fruitful cultural, historical, sociological and intellectual dialogue for generations to come.

## Acknowledgment

With many thanks to David Baumel and Lin Jie for reviewing this chapter with their comments and suggestions.

## Notes

- 1 For an overview of the major areas of cooperation between Jews and Chinese, see Avrum Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish-Chinese Nexus: A Meeting of Civilizations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008).
- 2 Chinese president Zhou Enlai's "four modernizations" were: industry, agriculture, defense, science and technology.
- 3 Deng Xiaoping (d. 1997) rose to leadership in 1976. He advocated China's "Opening Up Policy". In 1992 after he resigned he gave a monumental speech in South China's Shenzhen about the virtues of opening up which many believe influenced China's policies towards Korea and Israel. In 1992, China established diplomatic relations with Israel and South Korea, both being US allies.
- 4 Coined by Harvard University professor Joseph Nye, "soft power" is used to describe the ability of a political body, such as a state, to influence indirectly the behavior or interests of other political bodies through cultural or ideological means. See Wikipedia.
- 5 See *Haaretz*: "Peres meets Putin in Beijing" by Yossi Melman, 8 September 2008.
- 6 See my *Genesis to Monotheism* (forthcoming).
- 7 For example Rabbi Zalman Schachter Shalomi led a movement to reconcile and fuse Judaism with Buddhism. He taught at Naropa University, a private, liberal arts, Buddhist-inspired university in Boulder, Colorado. For further information, see: Rodger Kamenetz, *The Jew in the Lotus: A Poet's Re-Discovery of Jewish Identity in Buddhist India* (San Francisco, Calif.: Harper, 1994).

- 8 See Matthias Messmer, "China's reality from the viewpoint of Jewish foreign experts", in Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish–Chinese Nexus*.
- 9 Both are uncomfortable defining the status of a stranger or guest in their midst and have struggled with ways to accommodate "the other" in cultural discourse. Chinese, though gracious to guests, do not possess a mechanism for integration of strangers within their identity. The process of becoming Chinese is through becoming Chinese, adapting Chinese characteristics – something non-ethnic Chinese cannot do. Even while there is an opening up towards outside influence, none the less Western intellectual and cultural inflows are checked against a process of sinicization they continually undergo. This is discussed in Chapter 5. Though Jews do not seek membership outside those born into its ethnicity, Jewish law still, albeit reluctantly, accepts conversion to Judaism as a legitimate and authentic entry route. While noting differences, the similarities make Jewish-related religious and cultural studies less threatening and offensive to Chinese sensibilities. This refined, non-coercive worldview resembles traditional Chinese culture in its focus on nurturing personal example, perceived as superior to the barbarism of imperialism and forced concessions.
- 10 See Donald D. Leslie, *The Survival of the Chinese Jews* (Leiden: Brill, 1972). He refers to the Mongol policy concerning Jews. Even though the existence of a small Jewish community was hardly of concern to the imperial bureaucracy, government policy from the Yuan Dynasty (1271–1368) still exists, testifying to elaborate ethnic minority–government policy.
- 11 See Xu Xin, "Chinese government policy towards the Jews of Kaifeng and their descendants", in Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish–Chinese Nexus*.
- 12 In its heyday during the Song Dynasty, Kaifeng was the capital of China and perhaps the world's largest city at that time. See Nicholas Kristof, *The New York Times*, 5 May 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/22/opinion/22kristof.html?ex=1274414400&en=e8627a446cfd883d&ei=5090&partner=rssuserland&emc=rss>.
- 13 See Noam Urbach, "Kaifeng Jews", in Avrum Ehrlich (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC CLIO, 2008).
- 14 See, for example, Fu Youde, "A Chinese perspective of Judaism and the Jewish people" in Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish–Chinese Nexus*.
- 15 See Saloman Wald, *China and the Jewish People: Old Civilizations in a New Era* (Jerusalem: Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, 2004).
- 16 Personal correspondence and from her article. See Fu Xiaowei and Wang Yi, "Influence of Jewish literature in China", in Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish–Chinese Nexus*.
- 17 Fu Xiaowei and Wang Yi, "Influence of Jewish literature in China".
- 18 China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI), the most comprehensive Chinese database of articles in Chinese periodicals.
- 19 For more information on this subject, refer to: Zhong Zhiqing, "Modern Hebrew literature in China", in Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish–Chinese Nexus*.
- 20 Co-authored with Beverly Friend (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1995).
- 21 *Religion* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV, 2003).
- 22 Personal correspondence.
- 23 See Ariana Eunjung Cha, "Sold on a stereotype: in China", *Washington Post Foreign Service*, 7 February 2007.
- 24 See Chapter 1 for the genesis of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in China.
- 25 Fu Xiaowei, "The omission of Hebrew civilization in contemporary Chinese academic field and the countermeasure" (forthcoming).
- 26 Fu Xiaowei, "Confusing Judaism and Christianity in contemporary Chinese letters", in *Judaism*, 55 (217–18).
- 27 See Messmer, "China's reality from the viewpoint of Jewish foreign experts".
- 28 See transcript from August 2005 of the dialogue between Ehud Olmert (then vice prime minister) and Zhao Qizheng (former chairman of the news office of the



- State Council and now member of the Standing Committee of the Communist Party People's Consultative Committee CPPCC), in *Document Collection of the International Forum on the History and Culture of Harbin Jews* (Heilongjiang, 18 June 2006).
- 29 Another interesting area of Jewish Studies investigated by Wang Zhijun of Heilongjiang University is of the Karaite community in Harbin, based on community archives and the Karaite cemetery.
- 30 See *Document Collection of the International Forum on the History and Culture of Harbin Jews* (Heilongjiang, 18 June 2006).
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Messmer, "China's reality from the viewpoint of Jewish foreign experts".
- 33 See *Document Collection of the International Forum on the History and Culture of Harbin Jews* (Heilongjiang, 18 June 2006).
- 34 Avrum Ehrlich and Liang Pingan, "The contemporary condition of the descendants of the Jews of Kaifeng", in Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish-Chinese Nexus*.
- 35 Jiang Wenhan, *Ancient Chinese Christianity and Kaifeng Jews* (zhong guo gu dai you tai ren yu kaifeng you tai ren) (Beijing: The Press of Knowledge, 1982); Pan Guangan, *Historical Jewish Issues in China: Chinese Kaifeng Jews* (zhong guo jing nei you tai ren de ruo gan li shi wen ti) (Beijing: The Press of Peking University, 1983); Sha Boli, *Jews in Ancient China, Research of Chinese Scholars* (gu dai zhong guo you tai ren: zhong guo xue zhe de yan jiu) (Unknown publisher, 1983); Zhang Sui, *Judaism and Kaifeng Jews in China* (you tai jiao yu zhong guo kaifeng you tai ren) (Shanghai: The Press of Sanlian, 1990); Gu Xiaoming, *A Collection of Chinese Learning on Judaism in 1990s* (zhong guo you tai xue yan jiu zong hui) (Shanghai: Sanlian Press, 1992); Xu Xin, *The Jews of Kaifeng, China*, (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV, 2003); Xu Xin, *Legends of the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng*, (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV, 1995).
- 36 For example, on CCTV 4: [http://v.youku.com/v\\_show/id\\_XMTA4ODkzMDg.html](http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XMTA4ODkzMDg.html).
- 37 Ehrlich and Liang Pingan, "The contemporary condition of the descendants of the Jews of Kaifeng".
- 38 He is presently chief secretary of Kaifeng Research Institute on the History of the Ancient Chinese Jews, a mainly defunct organization; vice chief secretary, Center of Jewish and Israeli Studies – Social Sciences Academy of Shanghai.
- 39 Personal correspondence.
- 40 See Lin Ying, *On the Khanate in the Western Regions in the Tang Dynasty and on Ancient Jewish Links to China*. Also Peter B. Golden, Haggai Ben-Shammai, and Andras Rona-Tas (eds), *The World of the Khazars* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2007).
- 41 For a survey of the study of the Hebrew Bible in China, see Yiyi Chen, "The developing role of the Hebrew Bible in modern China", in Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish-Chinese Nexus*.
- 42 See Irene Eber, *The Jewish Bishop and the Chinese Bible: S. I. J. Schereschewsky* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999).
- 43 See Yiyi Chen, "The developing role of the Hebrew Bible in modern China".
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Carol Lee Hamrin, "China's Protestants", in *Tocqueville on China: A Project of the American Enterprise Institute* (May 2008).
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 The German Catholic Cathedral in Jinan has a large poster in its foyer outlining the life of Jesus and quotes the Talmud as the main book of the Jews as one of the sources and proofs for the life and existence of Jesus.
- 48 Personal correspondence with Aharon Chai ha- Sini.
- 49 Ilan Maor, "Sino-Israel relations at the start of the second decade: a view from Shanghai and Jerusalem", in Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish-Chinese Nexus*; Jonathan Goldstein, "Economic and cultural relations between China and Israel since



- the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992”, in Ehrlich (ed.) *The Jewish–Chinese Nexus*; Liang Pingan, “Chinese contributions to Mid East stability”, in Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish–Chinese Nexus*.
- 50 Zhang Ping, “Israel and the Jewish people on Chinese cyberspace since 2002”, in Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish–Chinese Nexus*.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 For example, David Liang, formerly editor of www.sina.com series of articles, entries and albums on Israel and the Jewish people on one of China’s most popular online news resources.
- 53 See Zhang Ping, “Israel and the Jewish people on Chinese cyberspace since 2002”.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 See Salomon Wald, *China and the Jewish People: Old Civilizations in a New Era* (Jerusalem: Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, 2004).
- 56 Ibid.
- 57 See Zhang Qianhong and Jerry Gotel, “Rethinking the Nanjing Massacre and its connection to the Jewish Holocaust”, in Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish Chinese Nexus*.
- 58 She focuses on the writings of Holocaust survivors (Ka-Tzetnik and Aharon Appelfeld), native-born Israelis (Haim Gouri and Hanoch Bartov) and those who behaved like native Israelis (Yehuda Amihai and Dan Ben-Amotz), and second-generation natives (Nava Semel and Savyon Liebrecht) and their respective views of the Holocaust.
- 59 See: transcript from August 2005 of the dialogue between Shimon Peres (then vice prime minister) and Zhao Qizheng (former chairman of the news office of the State Council and now member of the Standing Committee of the Communist Party People Consultative Committee CPPCC), in *Document Collection of the International Forum on the History and Culture of Harbin Jews* (Heilongjiang, 18 June 2006).
- 60 See Salomon Wald, *China and the Jewish People: Old Civilizations in a New Era*, (Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, Jerusalem, November 2004).
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Deuteronomy, 5: 18.
- 63 Jewish mystical ideas were careful not to eliminate the role of the individual, as is seen in many Kabbalistic and Hasidic writings.
- 64 See my forthcoming book *From Genesis to Monotheism*.
- 65 Paper at a Conference of Jewish Studies, at Nanjing University, October 2004.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Zhang Shuqing’s paper at a Conference of Jewish Studies, at Nanjing University, October 2004.
- 68 See Xu Xin, “On the Jabneh Revolution”, *The Journal of Jewish Studies* (Center for Judaic and Inter-Religious Studies, Shandong University), vol. 2.
- 69 The unique status of the Center for Judaic and Inter-Religious Studies at Shandong University mandated the appointment of a foreign professor to teach in areas in which Chinese did not have capacities. I was informed by the head of our department that I was one of the first foreign professors ever to be appointed into the ranks of Chinese academia. Since 2004, the trend of appointing foreigners not only as visiting academics and guest professors but also within the Chinese system has expanded. No doubt, as a result, further insightful Western observations and perceptions of the nuances of Chinese academia will be forthcoming.
- 70 This process of sinicization is fascinating and needs more discussion. I do so in brief in another chapter of this book and hope one day to be able to explore the mentality of self-censorship and adaptation that people undergo in compliance with the expectations of Chinese culture.

- 71 Though having expertise in certain historical periods and events, I have always been drawn to the applicability of academic research to contemporary circumstances and especially to Jewish nation-building. Upon observing this predilection in others, I must consider the possibility that my own approach was lacking maturity.
- 72 An example of this is Joseph Karo, author of the *shulkhan arukh*, who, it is evinced through his diary, *Maggid Meisharim*, imagined that the text – in his case the *Mishna* – was an angel in female form who came to unite with him in a semi-intellectual, semi-erotic way. For some insight into this episode, see my review of Morris M. Faierstein's *Jewish Mystical Autobiographies*, in *St Mark's Review: Quarterly of Religious Thought and Opinion*, (Canberra), vol. 188, 2000, Canberra, Australia.
- 73 God's name as symbolized by YHWH is written in Chinese as the following: 今往来, 今往来主, 今往来仙. The first three characters mean "past", "present" and "future". The last character (神) of the first word means God, 主: the lord, 仙, used in Daoist literature. Hence the word combines a Hebrew understanding of YHWH reflecting past, present and future as well as a Daoist notion of a deity. Another name, 雅赫威, is characters which are rendered into the sound Yahweh. A common name of God is 耶和华. In the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, scholars translated God's name as 雅维, or 雅赫维.
- 74 I discuss the proliferation of the Confucian Institutes in more detail in the Chapter 5.
- 75 See Salomon Wald, *China and the Jewish People: Old Civilizations in a New Era*, (Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, Jerusalem, November 2004).

## 5 Diaspora, identity and relationship with the homeland

A growing and potentially fruitful area of comparative philosophical and social inquiry relates to the study of the respective Jewish and Chinese Diasporas.

Both Jewish and Chinese identities are a subject of sensitivity and interest. Both are going through transitions. The meaning of being Jewish in an era of secularism, modernity and universalism, against the backdrop of the state of Israel, is part of the contemporary Jewish question. The quest for a Chinese identity, as Harvard Yenching Professor Tu Wei-ming describes, “has undergone major interpretive phases in recent decades and is now entering a new era of critical self reflection”.<sup>1</sup> Both deal with many of the same issues albeit in different ways, and it is worth understanding and comparing both with a mind that their respective experiences can inform each other.

In cooperation with some of my postgraduate students (Chinese post-graduates studying Judaism) who went abroad to attend Jewish Studies courses while concurrently maintaining ties with the Chinese community, together with research I did at the Shandong Department for the Co-Ordination of Overseas Chinese, and discussion with Chinese scholars of religion over four years at Shandong University, the distinguishing features between Jewish and Chinese diaspora communities became increasingly apparent to me. It occurred to me that some of the fundamental questions of national and ethnic identity, connectedness to homeland, patriotism, family, ethnicity, tradition and ideology emerge and are tested against the backdrop of the diaspora predicament. Bringing together an assortment of religious, national, legal, ideological, ethnic and other sociological and psychological components, the diaspora experience will no doubt continue to challenge nations and the principles of multiculturalism and mutual acceptance as we take larger steps towards understanding its structures and dynamics.

The term *diaspora* is of Greek origin, meaning “a scattering or sowing of seeds”, describing the phenomenon of the Jewish dispersion in the Hellenist world over 2000 years ago and used today to describe Jewish communities spanning most of the world’s nations and regions. The term is now also being used increasingly to describe other minority groups settling outside their homelands. The “experience” garnered from Jewish minority existence, negotiating community organization with national sovereignty and other political

models, has been recorded in Jewish communal memory. Absorbed into Jewish learning and synthesized into theological and religious texts and liturgy, studied by scholars, preserved in prayers and ritual, and reinvented over generations of Jewish community life till modernity, insightful theories in the field of diaspora studies have already been conceived and developed in the annals of Jewish life and thought.

This work draws from and illuminates various disciplines in comparative religion, Asian, Jewish and diaspora studies. It identifies areas and themes from the Jewish and Chinese diaspora reality which may be of interest and usefulness in understanding how different groups build their identity and relate to each other and to others, as they interact, exchange and fuse ideas and intellectual axes. The unique Chinese–Jewish axis is of particular interest in this chapter because of its diametrically contrasting contours. The lessons from this comparison are instructive for scholars of diasporas, multiculturalism, identity and comparative philosophy in Western countries – a useful insight into the reconstruction of a contemporary Chinese identity within China and for overseas Chinese. It is also useful to research on the Jewish Diaspora. By observing the features of other minority and diasporic groups, some of the unique features and characteristics of the Jewish Diaspora construct crystallize, and their distinguishing points are identified. Some of the problems with the Jewish Diaspora can equally be identified by observing the course of other diasporas.

Students of Judaism at universities around China work hard to learn from the experiences of Jewish history, theology and literature with the goal of borrowing valuable lessons for implementation within a Chinese context. As seen earlier, Confucian Studies is expanding in China and abroad, and scholars are actively comparing and referring, and borrowing from other religions and ideologies, to reconstruct an authentic Chinese intellectual, spiritual and political tradition for twenty-first-century China. Study of the Jewish religious and intellectual tradition is the latest fashion in some circles and is proving to offer valuable returns. Important as Confucian–Jewish dialogue may be, an arguably more lucrative area of study and intellectual borrowing may be discovered in the archives of Jewish diaspora and comparative diaspora experiences.

Chinese communities abroad are showing signs of adopting different ways to identify themselves as Chinese. The experiences, themes and ideas of the Jewish Diaspora are valuable models, markers and processes for them.

Chinese government policy regarding the status and identity of minorities, while striving to be sensitive and tolerant, may be drawing from insufficient national and cultural experiences to deal with the complex questions of belonging and minority identity, immigration, citizenship and human rights principles.

Overseas Chinese in search of an identity may be limiting their exploration by submitting to traditional Chinese interpretive structures which assert the primacy of the State and allegiance to political authority, and dismiss the

Western primacy of doctrine and “identity despite political association”. Western socio-political policies evolved from hundreds of years of trial and error, religious intolerance, civil wars, world wars and cold wars. It is indivisible from its democratic identity, its secular–religious axis, its technological and innovative prowess, as well as from other unique features of Western modernity.

The precarious paths negotiating minority identity have been uniquely trodden and navigated over millennia by Jewish community experiences which have in turn contributed to the great leaps Western and democratic nations made in affirming human and minority rights. The Jewish Diaspora experience could also be instructive to Chinese nation-building and overseas Chinese identity in a number of ways discussed later.

### **Referential value of the Jewish counterpoint**

Scholars of Chinese Studies addressing the question of Chinese identity invariably refer to the circumstances of the Jewish people as a point of reference or departure in their cogitations on Chinese identity. Tu Wei-ming observed the value he attributed to discussions with Jewish intellectuals including Benjamin Schwartz, Joe Levenson and Vera Schwarcz, and his reading of Jewish philosophers like Levinas, indicating the potential for Jewish applications to challenges facing contemporary Chinese identity.<sup>2</sup> In his article “Cultural China”, he notes that Chinese had “no functional equivalent for the yearning for Jerusalem”.<sup>3</sup> His other observations suggest reference to other components of diaspora Jewry. International workshops and published volumes of Confucian Studies invariably contain a chapter or paper of Jewish references analysis. In addition, a relatively high number of non-Chinese American scholars of Chinese history, philosophy, religion, culture, language and identity have been Jewish – in itself interesting. The perspectives of one ethnic group on another are also likely to lend valuable insight to the study of these disciplines.

Jewish values have made some impact on a number of Confucian schools of thought as well as on other ideologies and movements extant in China. The Jewish influence on Karl Marx and on Marxism is fascinating and a subject of interest to the Chinese public and scholars opening new avenues of hypothesis.<sup>4</sup> Viewed from the cultural context of the Chinese, Karl Marx’s thought bears more distinct signs of biblical and Jewish origins than European origins.<sup>5</sup> Most relevant to the dialectic between socialism and Confucianism are the messianic and universal dimensions of his thought which are discussed later.

This subject has not been exhausted and, to my mind, has only borne superficial references thus far, with many profound areas of reference still to be made. As Jews and Chinese meet and directly cooperate without the agencies of theory to keep them apart, these lessons are bound to burgeon into more practical areas.

The making of Jewish identity in diaspora lands, and the harmonization of Judaism with the host culture, is undoubtedly of value to Chinese immigrants and to their descendants living in Western countries. While in many respects the religious and community structures of the Jewish Diaspora are not compatible with Chinese circumstances, nevertheless understanding the skeletal structure of each identity is still instructive.

This is not to say that Judaism is a major focal point of Chinese inquiry. It is not! It remains a modest field, amongst many areas and disciplines of interest and inquiry for Chinese academics and policy think-tanks. Reality aside, the prospect of Chinese, either in China or among overseas Chinese, using Jewish cultural, doctrinal, ritual, sociological or political techniques, formulated in the crucible of Jewish history, to assert a cultural or national agenda alerts the imagination to the potential to transform the Chinese Diaspora and endow Chinese people with greater leverage than ever before. Perhaps because of the threat to the delicate balance amongst the pantheon of nations, or because of structural incompatibilities preventing it from doing so, or simply because time or opportunity has not prevailed, this has not yet manifested itself. If fusions of these kinds are possible, fusions which ensure the stability and harmonious accords of respect and cooperation amongst ethnic, religious and cultural groups are preferable.

### **A tale of two cities**

Described in the Bible and the Talmud as “exile”, distanced from God and from the homeland as a punishment because of national and individual sins, diaspora became a concept to describe any place outside the borders of the land of Israel representing a fundamentally unnatural condition for a Jew, even though the conditions were often politically and economically convenient, and Jewish identity was preserved in non-national paradigms. For the most part, communities over the diaspora formally hoped, prayed and supported a return to the spiritual homeland which would signify the end of the diasporic exile. The extent this component played was a subject of great sensitivity, and a source of social agitation and ecstatic patriotic feeling, which were subdued by the rabbinic mainstream.

Later rabbinic authorities developed far-reaching accommodations under the patronage of foreign monarchs and legislated rabbinic laws defining the responsibilities of the community to the host country especially relating to loyalty and faithfulness. Local Jewish leaders structured a self-supporting community so as to not burden the host state and honed other techniques to normalize the citizenship of Jews. These techniques and principles of normalization were discussed and debated and refined over centuries, so that Jewish communities are often viewed as model minorities. The Jewish circumstance touched a sensitive nerve for rulers, encapsulating some of the salient issues and challenges relating to minority identity, belonging and citizenship. The Jewish diaspora was a catalyst if not an active ingredient in

the evolution of equitable citizenship laws for themselves and later for all minorities. A minority admitting to mixed religious, ethnic and national loyalties raises the complex question of whether it could enjoy rights of citizenship concurrently with a rejection of the nation's basic religious tenets. These questions were fleshed out in the crucible of Jewish–host-country relations, and a number of working frameworks emerged.

The prophet Jeremiah expressed what has become a quintessential relationship between the Jew and the host country:

Seek out the welfare of the city to which I have exiled you and pray for it to the Almighty, for through its welfare will you have welfare.<sup>6</sup>

The Babylonian Talmud expands this idea in a radical theory of passivism and decentralized pietism:

we have been foresworn to three great oaths; not to ascend by group force to the Holy Land; not to rebel against the host regime where we live; and not to prolong the coming of the messiah by committing sins.<sup>7</sup>

The principle of Jewish diaspora identity was bound up in the welfare of the host country; and, however great the love for the Jewish homeland may have been, Jewish identity remained entirely dis-attached from Israel's political reality, and bound to ethics, piety and good deeds.

In this environment Jewish law alone became the most dominant arbiter of Jewish life, even though family relations, status in the host hierarchy, wealth and ethnic/caste status played contributory roles. As diasporas broadened and extended their reach, the only mechanism capable of matching the appeal of nationalism was religio-ethical legalism.

The Jewish community emerged in enveloping layers, combining economic interests, religious faith, guarded nationalism which was constantly deconstructed, educational facilities, communal worship and leadership, trade, inter-communal relations, theological discussion and dispute, existential, political and security needs, shared circumstances, and a continually developing shared and intertwined fate. These ideas laid the dialectical and philosophical foundations of Jewish diaspora identity.

## **Defining Jews and Judaism**

Jewry is difficult to define. Not only are Jews a religious group, a nation, a people and citizens of a (not always existing) country, but also, because the Jews have a long history outside fixed borders, are without any centralized leadership. They have been bound together by will alone, by voluntary observance of religious laws and faith in their uniqueness. Without centralized governance, Jews have had a kind of freedom to develop ideas and doctrines and behaviors outside religious doctrine, and presently have no ideological



consensus, no uniform code of behavior and no single agenda. Jews are bound together, but it is not entirely sure by what. In this respect, they escape definition by any conventional paradigms other than through their very existence. Because Jews emanate from diverse backgrounds and ethnic influences, their religious, political and social opinions run the entire social, religious, intellectual and scientific spectrum, as do their skills and professions. There are no easily defining criteria.

Nevertheless, if we may generalize, which we must to achieve this work's purposes, we may say that the Jews – at least those remaining Jewish in their own generation – are unified within a general fabric of Jewish tradition and loose religious ideas, possessing an acute sense of Jewish history and national memory, a feeling of being part of the Jewish heritage and the Jewish people. Further, there is a general sense of shared responsibility with the welfare of Jews wherever they may be. For the most part, Jews are concerned with the modern state of Israel and its security and success, together with a general sense of duty to act benevolently within their own society.

In addition, amongst Jews, there are varying degrees of religious faith and observance of customs, laws and traditions which many believe have kept the Jewish people intact over the two millennia of statelessness. While many Jews are not orthodox or observant, many recognize the role of tradition in preserving this identity. Hence the combination of tradition with freedom of thought has invariably emerged as one of its characteristics.

The role of the diaspora has been especially important in developing Jewish characteristics. Being, on the one hand, a nation unto itself while belonging to other nations and being loyal to other ideological and national paradigms on the other hand, has accelerated the complexity of Jewish thinking. Information synthesized within this double prism nurtured more complex intellectual paradigms and may be one of the reasons for the Jewish people's unusual profiles.

In addition, there are different types of diaspora Jews emanating from diverse countries. The Jews of Western Europe, of Eastern Europe, from North and South Africa, from Arab countries, from the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia often share an affinity as a minority in their countries, a desire to survive as a people and to be granted equality and rights as a religious group and full protection from threats of anti-Semitism. They were often heavily involved in their country's social, intellectual, economic and political life, and are therefore perceived to be disproportionately powerful. However, this power is unwieldable because there is no political, organizational or economic consensus that they share. Jews have often been the strongest advocates of secularism and superstructures, the reason being that within these superstructures they would be treated as equals, while within structures like Christianity or limited national ideologies they may be treated and discriminated against as minorities. These were some of the motives for Jewish support for ideological structures like socialism, communism, democracy and capitalism.

Finally, there are the Jews of the State of Israel. The rules applying to Israeli Jews are becoming increasingly like those applying to those of other modern states. We shall not discuss the subject of Israel at any length; suffice to note that the diplomatic, social and economic welfare of Israel remains a primary concern of Jews around the world and is likely to be part of any Jewish agenda wherever they may be. Any effort to nurture a Judeo-Chinese relationship would be difficult, and would not gain the support of Jewish scholars without a rehabilitation of Sino-Israeli relations.

Judaism is more complicated to define. It is the ideological, spiritual, philosophical, poetic, mystical, economic, political and legal frameworks which spanned the time and places that Jews reached. But Jews and Judaism are not identical. Judaism seeks to present an ideal, while Jews are an imperfect, often an unwilling partner of their own heritage.

Judaism has been influenced by many ideologies, political systems and circumstances. Wherever Jews have gone, they have integrated local thinking and ideologies, political and religious systems, and circumstances within the general ideas of Judaism. In many ways it has changed, but in many other ways it maintained distinct characteristics and succeeded in influencing the ideologies, political systems, peoples and circumstances around them. The framework that allowed this great mental flexibility is usually ascribed to Jewish law, which allowed for Jews to deviate in ideology and in geography, while maintaining observance of “the halakha”. But over the last few hundred years other methods have emerged to replace observance of Jewish law as the instrument for uniting Jews over ideological and geographical distances.

### **Who is a Chinese?**

The Chinese diaspora had a different genesis. The Chinese name for China, *Zhong Guo* 中国, or “Middle Kingdom”, belies the perception that China was the center of the world, and anything outside was a periphery and inferior. References to settlements outside the Middle Kingdom reflect this sense: for example, “Tang communities” (唐人 *tang ren jie*), referring to the Tang Dynasty (618–907), known as China’s golden age, its advancement in culture and its tolerance of outside influence, perhaps also suggesting the hope of reciprocity for hospitality. The term “sojourners” (*huaqiao* 华侨) is also used for overseas Chinese, even those who have received foreign citizenship, suggesting an essential association with the homeland. “Ancestral home”, *zuguo*, refers to the filial piety of Confucian culture and the call for economic support that Chinese towns make to their overseas compatriots through the two Chinese capitals of Beijing and Taipei. Another term is *luoye guigen*, referring to overseas Chinese who plan to return to China to retire, acknowledging that their adopted home was temporary. As Chinese emigrants spread throughout the world, their relations with the Middle Kingdom changed. Another term, “Chinese port” (华埠 *huabu*), denotes a place across the sea used as a temporary abode for Chinese traders or travelers. As their

host country becomes most important to them, expression of Chinese identity via the supremacy of China no longer appealed and underwent transition to less nationalistic terms of engagement. Chinatown (中国城 *zhongguo cheng*) has become the most generic name, at least in English. The commonly used term for a Chinese Diaspora is *huaren* 华人, which refers to “people of Chinese culture”, suggesting a reference to behavior over nationalism.

Ample evidence attests to Chinese travel to non-Chinese regions. Fourth-century Buddhist monks traveled to India and Central Asia. Ninth-century (Tang Dynasty) Buddhist monk Jian Zhen traveled to Japan. Early-fifteenth-century (Ming Dynasty) expeditions of Zheng He arguably reached the shores of North America and New Zealand. Chinese sailors traveled in Spanish ships between the Philippines and Mexico from the late sixteenth century onward, and aboard British and American ships bringing tea, silk and porcelain to North America in the eighteenth century. During the 1800s, emigrants mainly from South China panned out over Asia, first in Japan and Bangkok, and reached the United States. During the California gold rush of 1848, San Francisco’s Chinese community formed, and Chinatowns spread along the West Coast and extended to Australia and New Zealand during the gold rush. Seeking economic opportunity and to escape poverty, they worked in mines and on railroads, and in response to waves of anti-Chinese feeling made their way to the relative safety of major cities, establishing communities and independent economic enclaves known as Chinatowns. They existed in East Asia, Southeast Asia, North America, South America, Australia, Europe and the United Kingdom.

Yet these were still the exceptions and anathema to the norm. Curiously, lack of evidence of old Chinese communities existing in foreign lands suggests that Chinese immigrants rapidly integrated, did not develop the tools to pass their culture down to their offspring or did not possess the techniques to preserve a community identity over generations or centuries.<sup>8</sup>

In the 1900s this showed signs of change. Students and scholarly exchanges were popular, and a cosmopolitan Chinese character was developing. After the communist takeover during the 1940s, political refugees and dissidents sought asylum, and Chinese identity was debated between political wings. In the 1980s waves of dissidents were permitted entry to foreign countries, but these also included a large number of non-dissidents seeking jobs and opportunities. The emigrants of the last decade include: more wealthy and educated Chinese who are funded by their families to earn citizenship and seek professional, scholastic and economic opportunities abroad or to enjoy the benefits of richer and freer countries; researchers and professionals sent with the blessing of the Chinese government to learn and bring back knowledge in strategic disciplines; students wishing to gain study and work experience in advanced nations; and student, professional, artistic and diplomatic ambassadors sent to expand and enhance China’s international profile.

Despite its wealth of literature, philosophy, religious and cultural traditions, Chinese spiritual and intellectual activity was glaringly absent from the history

of foreign cities where they lived for at least a century and a half. Particularly absent are literary and intellectual accommodations interpreting the Chinese identity to its new circumstances. Unless another adequate explanation such as persecution or intolerance of the host country is proposed, it is reasonable to argue that the rapid erosive nature (over one or two generations) of Chinese cultural identity may be attributed to some of the basic intellectual underpinnings of Chinese thought.

Only in the last hundred years, from the beginnings of the dialectical debate between the Chinese scholarly tradition and other foreign ideas, has the question of a universal Chinese identity come under more serious consideration. It has been just in the last few decades has this subject been endowed with critical mass by a wave of cultural scholars who made their way to foreign shores.

None-the-less the ability to sustain long-term trans-generational cultural, intellectual or spiritual processes beyond the reach of the Chinese state is as glaringly absent as the ability of the Confucian structure to sustain national structures is extant. Tu Wei-ming observes this phenomenon, too:

indeed virtually no institution of significance (university, church, press, professional society, or civic organization) has lasted for more than a generation. . . . The most devastating rupture, however, occurred within the intellectual community.<sup>9</sup>

The opposite is true of Jews, who have evinced skill at developing institutions of long-term duration, but have a poor history of sustaining sovereign statecraft.

The nature of Jewish districts has evolved; while in the past serving as centers for manufacturing, trade and commerce, and despite many incarnations until and fluidity in the present, the stimulus and the basic format of the Jewish district are founded in quintessentially different realities and motives from those of Chinatowns.

There would rarely be a distinguishing mark of a Jewish community like the large red *paifang* arch at the entrance of a Chinatown. Jewish districts were marked by synagogues, study houses and schools of various levels and distinctions, ritual baths, kosher restaurants, bakeries, butcheries and other small shops and service businesses including ritual scribes and bookshops. In many cases, especially in regions with a history of persecution, caution was taken that Jewish-owned stores and religious centers were not distinguished. Synagogues and schools were commonly tucked away in courtyards without signage. Local wealthy Jewish contributors would donate to synagogues and schools or to children's education or to food for the poor. The Jewish districts would sustain their own economies, but the stimulus for the economies was different from that of the Chinatowns.

A Jewish ghetto was constructed under the influence of Jewish law (*halakha*), which necessitated a Jewish presence of ten adult men for Jewish

religion to begin to function. To observe the Sabbath, Jews had to live within walking distance of synagogues and community centers, and naturally formed concentrated enclaves. To obtain ritually slaughtered meat and kosher-prepared products, Jews shopped in outlets catering to the Jewish district. Demand for religious paraphernalia necessitated scribes; the need for Jewish education warranted the training and recruitment of able teachers. Spiritual and community needs underwrote the wages for rabbis and religious scholars, and a plethora of other community functionaries formed the backbone of the community economy.

None the less the Jewish enclave would hardly be a site of tourism or entertainment; it would be almost inconceivable for a brothel or a casino to be in the Jewish enclave. The origins of the enclave are founded primarily in doctrine and religious law, and only consequently in social *morés* and economy. Industries antithetical to doctrine would be hard to sustain in this environment and would meet significant obstacles from the community and its contingencies.

Though restaurants and food outlets are common in the Jewish districts of a city, and these are a defining feature of the economy of the district, there remains a stark contrast in orders of magnitude. Chinatowns are incontestable attractions for Chinese, non-Chinese and tourists in terms of dining, social gatherings, cultural and entertainment activities. These centers invariably emerge as a hub of associated economic activity, shops, services, entertainment, and a source of cheap labor as Chinese immigrants live close by to avail themselves of jobs in a Chinese-speaking environment, to speak Chinese dialects, to learn the local language, to eat the food and buy the products they are used to, and to acclimatize more easily to the new country.

Chinatowns, Chinese diasporas and identities are becoming increasingly more complex, being enveloped by layers of immigration and cultural and intellectual transformations. For example, Professor Wang Gungwu of Hong Kong University identifies what he believes to be a new phenomenon in the development of Chinese diaspora identity in the “remigration” of Chinese Malaysian, Indonesian, Filipino, Vietnamese and other Chinese living in regions of South and Southeast Asia. He observes that one of their primary reasons for remigration is to escape discrimination and intolerance of their desire to retain vestiges of their Chinese identity and to ensure that their offspring remain Chinese in identity; but they do not choose to return to China, preferring Australia, New Zealand, the United States and other Western countries.<sup>10</sup>

This signals an evolution in the complexity of the Chinese Diaspora, fomenting dialectics of identity and developing character traits more closely resembling the Jewish diaspora construct, in that most Jews do not emigrate from Israel but from other diaspora lands which were their homes for generations.<sup>11</sup>

### **Similitude and dissimilitude**

Jews and Judaism may be a useful reference for Chinese to understand in what way they differ and how their identities are constructed. The existence

of Chinese and Jewish Diasporas in modern democratic countries causes them to share some superficial traits which, though worthy of mention, are not as significant as some of their differences. While the similarities illuminate the shared circumstances of Jews and Chinese as minorities within a Western host nation, the differences between them arguably illuminate the specific principles governing their national, religious, ethnic dynamics of identity. Comparing Jews and Chinese helps to contrast more sharply the cultural characteristics and more clearly discern their unique natures.

Both claim to be ethnic minorities in relation to the host country; both are proud of their national and cultural origins; and both experience a range of feelings towards homeland, ethnicity, religio-philosophic outlook which are rooted in patronage to an authority outside their country of residence. Both Chinese and Jews express a range of affinities and emotional ties with their ethnic homeland (the People's Republic of China and the modern State of Israel). Both have political wings with raging debate in their diasporas (Beijing and Taipei, Israel and the Palestinian conflict). Both modern states seek to expand relations with their diasporas and satellites, which complicates their identity as minority citizens. Both Jewish and Chinese identity are influenced or affected by events taking place in their ethnic homeland. Both communities are governed by deeply rooted traditions and sensibilities. Both have developed community structures, social and political representation as minorities. Both communities boast population concentrations which congregate to express their unique culture, food, celebrations and way of life, which in turn sustains and promotes local home-grown industries and the wealth of the local community. Both communities have a food preparation and eating culture that serves as a foundation of their group existence. Language is important to both communities. Both have religious and cultural gathering-places. Both communities have traditional and more assimilated wings. Both minorities develop ideologies and systems of thought to accommodate their varying circumstances. Both view improved education systems as necessary to cater to their community members and address the challenges of preservation versus assimilation. Both are minority communities in Western democratic countries, with different political and religious cultures. Both share some of the same economic and social circumstances. All of which lends to the impression of sameness and similitude, which in turn lends to feelings of mutual solidarity, dialogue and eagerness to exchange experiences.

### **Summary of differences**

Other features of the two diasporas suggest antithetical organizational axes. Contemplating these comparative diasporas, discerning delicate and essential differences, helps to illuminate the underpinnings of each and to identify the intellectual axis around which each community revolves.

One of the most obvious differences is that the majority of Chinese live in China, and the mainstay of Chinese culture is preserved and expressed in



China. A fractional percentage of Chinese live as a minority in other countries, and Chinese culture is reduced and diminished in its minority format. On the other hand, the Jewish diaspora represents the majority of the Jewish people and has done so for nearly two millennia. The mainstay of Jewish culture takes place in a diaspora context as a minority group in a host country. The main intellectual, philosophical and religious tenets, texts and ideas were composed in or written in reference to the diaspora. While the homeland represented a distinct and irreplaceable component of its identity, it did not play a tangible practical role in most of the last two thousand years of Jewish life.

While Chinese believe they emerged from the Yellow River in northern China and are indigenous to the land, Jews believe their ancestor Abraham emigrated from Ur Kasdim to the land of Canaan and settled there as a rightful inheritance given by God. The premises of ethnicity and territory versus doctrine and laws of inheritance are virtually antithetical.

Diaspora Jews preserve the memory of Israel in what was till 1948 a homeland of the collective consciousness only, with comparatively little living Jewish culture to speak of existing in pre-state Israel, while the Chinese homeland has continually been the source of the Chinese collective consciousness, generating emigration and the flow of culture and tradition from within. These circumstances are changing as the state of Israel burgeons and slowly becomes the center of contemporary Jewish life, and as the Chinese Diasporas grow and develop their own intellectual life outside China. In many ways, over the last decades some of the diaspora-related circumstances of Jews and Chinese have been reversing. This trend is amplified by the increasingly intellectual nature of the new Chinese immigrant population, who in contrast to earlier, poorer and less educated immigrants are wealthier, educated, of financial means, and capable and willing to conceive of intellectual accommodations for their mixed identities. This subject will need more detailed attention in future studies.

Another difference is that Jewish emigration has traditionally not been from Israel, rather from other diaspora countries. Polish, Russian, German Jewish emigrants to the United States took with them an already complex layer of national and religious identification different from the Chinese immigrants who mainly came directly from China. This trend is changing as Indonesian and Malaysian Chinese and other Asian Chinese minorities emigrate to the United States and develop complexity to their Chinese identity. Concurrently, Israeli Jewish emigrants who arrive on the shores of the United States, Europe, Australia and other countries are unclear how they will construct their identity. The process is still fluid for both immigrant groups. Israelis may still opt to use Jewish models rather than more conventional immigrant models of adaptation while Chinese may or may not use religious-spiritual models for ethnic preservation, or opt for a China-based identity, or prefer a slow but steady progression towards total assimilation.

Jews claim to be concurrently an ethnic minority, a nation and a religion while commonly contesting the parameters of all of them. None of the



categories could singly embrace the diversity of the Jewish community; without one of them, large sections would not define themselves as Jews. Chinese more easily identify themselves as Han ethnicity without identifying psychological spiritual foundations.

The Jewish enclave is the access point and place of fusion with the host culture.<sup>12</sup> The Chinatown is the access point and breaking point with the host country, recourse to Chinese culture.

Jewish languages differ from host country to host country; a modern Jewish community bringing together disparate language groups is often united by the language of the host country. Chinatowns, on the other hand, are often the refuges from the host country's language and food. Hebrew language is learned in diaspora communities primarily as ritual and liturgical language used in its written form; while, owing to their complexity, Chinese characters are the first components of Chinese intellectual traditions to be forgotten. Spoken Mandarin or Cantonese is a major source of Chinese community cohesion and a source of difference with the host country.

Jews are often apprehensive about being identified as Jews, and have the option to disguise their identity and culture if they wish; it being hard to tell the difference between a Jew and a non-Jew, modern Jewish identity takes on a different set of emotional associations. Chinese do not have this flexibility; even second- and third-generation ethnic Chinese, with little or no cultural/intellectual identity markers as Chinese, have ethnic markers which have a variety of effects on the individual and his/her identity.

Jewish communities like Chinese communities are relatively insular and exclusive. Marriage, friendship, business, affinity with or study of Jews and Jewish culture are not sufficient to be accepted into the community. None the less, Judaism is not entirely exclusive in that entry into community life and even into its deepest inner dynamics is available through the process of religious conversion. This is the singular entry point for non-Jews, and is accepted and respected by all Jews, from the most liberal to the most insular and fundamental. This provision has far-reaching implications for the nature of the Jewish community. Though an insular and generally exclusive ethnic group, the preparedness to embrace sincere converts, be they Chinese, Arab, African or German, without any exclusion or discrimination, indicates Jewish acceptance of other ethnicities. Some converts to Judaism have in history and in the present become leading rabbis and luminaries. Jewish religious legislation relating to converts aims to protect their rights and dignity. This process is recognized in the state of Israel, and a person from any nationality in the world can convert and become an Israeli citizen through this process.

In overseas Chinese diaspora communities, the barriers into the community are ethnic and cultural, and it is rare for a foreigner to gain entry. There exists no formal or informal conversion or acceptance process, and limited psychological infrastructure exists to accommodate the non-Chinese within Chinese culture. The main paradigms to accommodate the stranger within

a Chinese context are as business partners or clients, consumers, guests, dignitaries, travelers, or perhaps as friends. But Chinese have not developed a psychological–intellectual mechanism to accept a non-Chinese into their community and within their leadership. Amongst Chinese immigrants, the group centers on family, clans, ethnic minorities or dialects; entry of others into these groups is not conceivable. Chinese government extends this cultural characteristic and has difficulty in formulating equitable citizenship laws in the same way as Jewish conversion or citizenship laws of Western countries provide an entry for all peoples on the basis of fixed criteria. This hermetic insularity complicates Chinese perceptions and sense of identity and its interrelations with other nations and with foreigners and minority groups that reside in China. I discuss some of these problems in another chapter.

Jewish charitable, social welfare and self-help groups have developed over millennia. Sensitive not to be, or appear to be, a burden on the host state, Jewish institutions and individual benefactors support education, welfare, hospitals, care of the elderly, assistance for the disabled, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and so on to the needy members of the community. Jewish charitable philosophy is dynamic and changes with the generations. It is a subject of debate and discussion in communal forums and amongst leaders and rabbis, and philanthropic strategy changes, and adjusts to changing circumstances and challenges. Chinese social and charitable associations are relatively undeveloped and commonly base membership on belonging to a common clan, sharing a common name, speaking the same dialect, sharing the specific village, region or country of origin.<sup>13</sup> While ethnic origins are important in Jewish circles, unlike Chinese benevolent associations, charities are formed with the goal of distributing without reference to sub-cultural and sub-ethnic groups. Jewish charities are often inclined to universal as well as local goals; many may include in their mission statement assistance to nations or non-Jewish individuals in distress.

The absence of continuous historical Chinese diasporas (or remnants of their existence) is an important distinction between Jews and Chinese. Chinese diasporas are not usually very old, they do not span hundreds or thousands of years, there are no historical signs of the intellectual or cultural struggle between Chinese minority identity and the rule of a sovereign culture. Considering the high numbers of Chinese immigrants relative to Jewish immigrants, it is still surprising that the Chinatown did not develop other non-economic dimensions to its community persona. It is surprising that, over the two hundred years of Chinese–American, Chinese–Canadian, Chinese–English, Chinese–Australian ties, little literature dealing with the issues of mixed identities was penned; it took till this decade for a Chinese diaspora identity to take on more distinguished features and for the premises for future dialogue to be laid.

As Chinese immigrants or their children got used to foreign foods and ceased speaking Chinese dialects, their dependency on the Chinatown and the

Chinese community also eroded. Over an extended period from the 1950s till the 1980s, Chinese immigration to the United States was limited, and the Chinese community steadily assimilated into American life. If not for the stimulatory factor caused by the relaxing of immigration applications to the United States beginning after the Tiananmen Square Massacre, the gap between old Chinese immigrants and the waves of immigrants over the last decade may not have been bridgeable. The differences in dialect, education, world-view and religious sensibilities between the old and new waves of immigrants is such that the communities continue to have little intellectual or spiritual engagement, and interact on a fragile thread of Chinese characters, common cuisine and temporary economic interests of the enclave.

Jewish communities differ entirely, functioning with reference to Jewish law and doctrine and values which, despite different languages and ethnic origins and even periods of insulation, provide a framework for integration with one another. Even secular and assimilated Jews preserve relations with the more abstract mechanisms of Jewish identity and comprise part of the diverse wings of the extended community. This subject is complex and cannot be left without further investigation elsewhere.<sup>14</sup>

### **Constructing the Chinese diaspora**

Each wave and group of Chinese immigrants brought with them their cultural associations, ethnic identity, religious, ideological and class behavior. The numbers are already sizable, spanning many countries, dialect groups, religions and political preferences. Chinese authorities, not wishing to alarm foreign sensibilities to the large numbers of Chinese immigrants, conservatively suggest that about 40 million first-generation Chinese immigrants live abroad, though this is likely to be in the hundreds of millions including second and third generations. The numbers are exponentially higher if one considers fourth, fifth and sixth generations of Chinese. Perhaps the rapid assimilation they undergo has spared them a political crisis with their host countries. Despite the numbers, or maybe because of them, the way they construct their identity in foreign countries is still vague.

Though China formally recognizes five religious groupings<sup>15</sup> – Buddhism, Daoism, Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam – and fifty-six ethnic minorities, there are other cultural influences informed by other non-recognized ethnicities and religions including a host of superstitions, witchcraft and family-based deities.<sup>16</sup> None the less these do not seem to play a critical role in the formation of an identity. The reality of modern China, its socialist ideology, its political and administrative culture, the events of recent history, the Cultural Revolution and Tiananmen Square, as well as policies such as the Family Planning and the One Child Policy, the latest principles of Harmonious Society and the success of its economy also affect, to differing degrees, the sensibilities of the latest wave of emigrants, either positively or to invoke negative

reactions. But none of these seems to play a critical role in defining Chinese identity.

The Chinese Scholarly Tradition (*Ru Jia* 儒家), closely associated with Confucianism, has had one of the most profound influences on Chinese thinking. Even though inclusive of other religious disciplines, overriding them by its stability and hierarchical structure, it is not clear if, to what degree and in what manner it influences Chinese diaspora identity. Another important influence on the Chinese identity is the food preparation and culinary culture unique to the Chinese which has a far-reaching influence on Chinese thinking, culture and habits, which are discussed in Chapter 2.

Enough research exists to begin comparing and analyzing the patterns of various immigrant groups, how they establish communities, and the way they assimilate, disperse and diversify throughout the socio-economic and intellectual plethora of their host countries. Contrast with other religious and ethnic groups is necessary to understand fully the processes involved. Reference to and contrast with Judaism is of particular value as it negotiates ethnicity, doctrine, ideology and language, and has exemplified an accommodation with many social and political realities.

Superficially it seems that, while a high level of assimilation occurs in both Chinese and Jewish groups, in the Chinese context the loss of culture is not replaced by doctrine or ritual, so that Chinese identity fades over extended periods. In the Jewish case, even relatively ignorant ethnic Jews are able to identify via intellectual, religious, emotional, scholarly sentiments and networks and constitute the “Jewish experience”.

The foundations of Chinese identity are predicated on a number of absolute criteria – ethnicity, language, experience of a distinct system of thought and authority. Its tangible nature limits maneuverability and accommodation with diversity, though there is ample opportunity for it to evolve given the right circumstances.

In 2007 I had the opportunity to participate in and observe a fascinating event, reminiscent of what may have occurred in the spiritual capital of the Jewish people, Jerusalem, thousands of years earlier, discussion of the survival of a people’s identity in dispersion being the fundamental motif.

Jinan was the designated meeting place. As the capital of Shandong Province, the epicenter of Chinese culture, the provincial authorities have been nurturing the region’s role as a spiritual and cultural center for modern China. The meeting hall was a luxurious hotel, Shun Farming Village Hotel, believed to be the site where Shun, one of the legendary emperors in China’s prehistory, farmed. Hosted by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council, the guests were proverbial “pilgrims” consisting of “Outstanding Overseas Chinese People”. The group was comprised of ninety-nine distinguished overseas Chinese who had achieved eminence and success in fields as diverse as economics, science, politics and research in nineteen countries and regions around the world. I was invited to talk on “the construction of the Jewish diaspora and its implications for the Chinese”. A frank and open

discussion ensued on how to preserve Chinese identity in their growing diasporas.

Though requiring more rigorous analysis and discussion, the following summaries of the round-table discussion reflect some of the major themes relating to diaspora identity in general and to Chinese identity in particular.

A New Zealand Chinese told the group that fifteen years earlier there had been ten China associations in New Zealand and today there are over a hundred. She complained that there is rarely contact between them. The first immigrants were from Guangdong, speaking Cantonese; today they are Mandarin-speakers. The older and newer immigrants have difficulties communicating. The older community is cut off from the new wave of immigrants. Economic relations are growing fast. But the embassy officials also only speak Mandarin. She suggests a way to accommodate Cantonese-speakers in the embassy and other services. Associations should hold regular conferences, and officials from the Chinese embassy should attend to develop contacts between the overseas Chinese and government organs. Many associations are established and compete to be representative and be the leading association. The Chinese government could be involved to help minimize infighting.

A Chinese Portuguese noted the long history of friendship between the Chinese and the Portuguese. He was unsure of how to develop a relationship and was open to ideas at the conference.

A Chinese Swede who headed the association of immigrants from Chaozhou in Guangdong noted that the establishment of Chinese associations was helpful in doing business and could help achieve Chinese policies abroad.

An Italian Chinese representative told the group that he had come to discover and explore Confucian culture. He indicated his belief that the Chinese embassy needs to be more closely involved in coordinating the more effective dissemination of Chinese culture. He noted that the younger generation of Italian-Chinese are better-educated and attend Chinese Confucian schools, they read Chinese and are required to speak Chinese with their families.

A Chinese Japanese professor of oriental art believes that economic opportunities exist in Japan, but China should also invest culturally using "the abacus in one hand, the analects in the other".

Another Chinese Japanese, who left Shandong fourteen years earlier, feels that he should contribute more to China. He notes China's power is growing in Japan: 250,000 Chinese live around Kyoto. There are a lot of Chinese associations; many have similar functions, so they have merged into an umbrella style, federal association and rotating chairperson.

A Chinese Canadian businessman runs a franchise and wants to develop franchises in China, too. He wants to help Chinese workers come to Canada. He believes that Chinese culture should be shared.

Another Chinese Canadian announced that culture was in the blood and bones of the Chinese and did not require a bible. He acknowledged the

Cantonese–Mandarin problem. He was concerned how to set up an education system to ensure his children and grandchildren receive a Chinese education, suggesting a role for government in setting up a Confucian Institute in his city would be useful and would also recognizing that a grass-roots education system was necessary. He noted that the older generation did a lot to maintain Chinese culture but now it was their challenge and they needed efficient communication with the Chinese government and support for the financial burden of setting up education systems. He was concerned that the next generation of American-born Chinese (ABC) will know nothing about China. He hoped that after receiving a Western education they may go back to a university in China for a few years before returning to the West. He was convinced that the future belonged to China.

Deputy chair of the China Association in Greece described his great love for China and his desire to help link Chinese people around the world. He noted that Chinese people do good things but also damage the Chinese reputation around the world. He called for Chinese to do good things and to uphold morality and integrity and defend the Chinese reputation.

Deputy chair of the China Association in Spain came to explore potential to build a relationship. He believes that the associations should play a more political role in developing relations between Spain and China.

The Chinese Portuguese said: “Our heart is for our country. We will try our best to help our China.” He suggested that Chinese universities recognize the curriculum of foreign universities so that overseas Chinese can get transfer credit at Chinese universities. He noted that many overseas Chinese are too busy to help or to visit China but want to lend support in some way. He said there is a newspaper that disseminates information in Chinese, but conferences should also be organized and business opportunities to develop the economy of immigrants.

A Chinese Thai discussed the crisis of the next generation. He noted that the youth get a little Chinese education in elementary school, but there is no Chinese curriculum in the Catholic middle school many attend. Sometimes a private tutor is hired to teach Chinese. She sent her children and grandchildren to Beijing to hear the Beijing Opera, and believes that this is a simple and easy way to ensure their cultural connection. “We should never forget our culture.” She grew up speaking Thai but speaks to her children and grandchildren in Chinese. She is delighted to hear her grandchild sing Chinese songs. She notes that by law they are Thai but in fact they are Chinese and should promote their culture.

Another Thai Chinese complained that Chinese suffered because of the political coup in Thailand in 2007. He noted that classic Chinese education was important, that the Thai Chinese do not want to be any other people than Chinese and that they should not forget their homeland. “Chinese have dignity, should not allow others to look down on us.” “Educate in Chinese language from generation to generation.” “Stand up against separatists in Taiwan and never surrender to them.”

The general secretary of the Chinese Association of Holland suggested a forum to share experiences of how to manage Chinese communities. He observed that Chinese growth as a world power is of great interest to the rest of the world. The economic boom provides an opportunity for overseas Chinese to invest. With economic growth, cultural activities invariably grow. "It seems that now everyone is interested in culture." As the economy grows, more people recognize that heritage is important and association with homeland is important.

A Chinese Indonesian observed that the biggest Chinese community outside China was in Indonesia, but almost paradoxically the country still had an anti-Chinese immigration policy. (That said, Indonesia is the only country with a public holiday on the spring festival; this privilege was fought for and not easily won). He noted that Chinese associations were organized on the basis of province of origin, or based on family names or according to professions such as teachers' associations. He suggested that a charter be written which would constitutionalize the rules for relationship between these associations and China, and make their activities more efficient.

A number of common themes arose in their points. The first was the changing attitudes of overseas Chinese accompanying the expansion of the economic power of China. The second was the request for Chinese government involvement in their lives and the activities of their associations. The third was the ambiguous connection between sharing "Chinese culture" and sharing "economic opportunities". The fourth was the general and enthusiastic patriotism together with the uncertainty of what it means to preserve "Chineseness".

Hands clapped furiously and eyes glowed brightly with the mention of China's unity and strength. People clearly derived a great sense of pride from the attention that China's economy is attracting and the perception of China as a superpower.

It seems that now that the Chinese Communist Party has vindicated itself and its ability to lead to economic success, overseas Chinese are eager to embrace the rising star and seek avenues to engage in dialogue with the government.

Earlier criticism fades into eagerness for opportunity. The hope that, via overseas Chinese associations, they can develop bilateral ties and channels of communication with government bodies seems to be on their minds. The discussion regarding the renewal of Chinese culture, although deeply felt as a concept, is more of an offering to the Chinese authorities, a vague euphemism for an exchange allowing Chinese governmental influence into the lives of overseas Chinese in exchange for political and economic cooperation and opportunities.

Convinced that the future belongs to China, it is not surprising that overseas Chinese wish to send their children back, to create opportunities for them and to develop political ties in perceived corridors of power.

It appears that many of the Chinese overseas associations were established for mutual benefit and self-help, and not necessarily to exchange culture or



share common experiences or to contribute to the proliferation of Chinese culture. It seems, as noted by one of the participants, that a grassroots cultural drive amongst Chinese is lacking.

The reasons why Chinese return to the homeland combine personal and family matters with prospects for business or political opportunities, or to be treated with dignity by the provincial government. The regional representatives expressed similar and different concerns relating to their lives as overseas Chinese. They recognized the broader ethnic-cultural-spiritual relationship shared between overseas Chinese and the Chinese homeland but were equally noncommittal that this was not an overriding priority. What emerged were differences dividing them: political persuasion, ethnicity, dialects, regional differences, social class, personal jealousies. The limitations on horizontal cooperation with government, a feature inherent in the Confucian structure, also lay as a likely pitfall just beneath the surface.

What the basis of overseas Chinese identity is remains unclear as does whether or not, and how or if their diaspora circumstance is contributing to the reconstruction of Chinese identity, or if overseas Chinese are becoming an extension of existing identity constructs.

Past efforts by scholars and ideologues to forge a Chinese identity based on non-political, non-territorial axioms may have lost their natural constituencies to the manifest opportunities of "Economic China" which is now successfully competing to become the major draw card and focal point for overseas Chinese identity.

Scholars of "Cultural China" and advocates of "Christian China" and "Christian Confucianism" as well as other alternative ethnic-doctrinal models for Chinese identity have perhaps lost momentum and relevance in the wake of the new political, territorial and economic horizons of "Economic China", which arouse a general desire to identify and celebrate its manifest success. In this environment, there is little tension or need for alternative paradigms, as few could be disappointed with the achievements of the political echelons. However, "Economic China" may in the long run line the road with necessary intellectual and psychological stepping stones for a broader dissemination of "Cultural China". As educated Chinese migrate to foreign countries, and more incentives exist for them to seek a spiritual and cultural identity as Chinese, complying with citizenship expectations and natural assimilatory patterns within their adopted lands, they may succeed in fusing a more dialectically sound Chinese-host-country identity where their forebears did not. Perhaps a self-empowered, educated, wealthy and confident Chinese immigrant is better-furnished to find a fusion with Western culture than one who does so out of necessity or utility.

It is noteworthy that the rabbis of the Talmud, during the Second Babylon Exile from the second to the tenth centuries, were concerned to delineate clearly the question of motive and axiomatic foundations of Jewish identity. They sought to ensure that the success of the Jewish people's economy, its rising or falling fortunes or political achievements, did not become an incentive for

converts to Judaism, but rather Judaism's doctrine and spiritual values would be the cornerstone of the convert's identity. Converts were ritually warned that the Jews may suffer and be exposed to danger and hardship, be politically homeless and pursued, and no material value would come from becoming Jewish. The underlying interest in this rabbinic worldview was the primacy of faith and spiritual identity over an identity relating to political, territorial or financial benefit. This demarcation has not been clearly articulated by Chinese thinkers, and it seems that attempts are scrambled by the overwhelming credibility that the conservative position has earned owing to China's thriving economy.

One of the strongest mediums of identity is the Chinese language. Its characters are a source of history, culture, ethics, thought and psychological dynamics used daily to communicate and reinforce. The symbolic nature of Chinese pictograms makes them lovable, endearing and profoundly meaningful to those who know them. The reality of assimilation is that, as the Chinese language is forgotten, Chinese identity fades. The pedagogic priority of teaching Chinese to second-generation overseas Chinese children, whether in the framework of school, by private tuition, at the expense of other subjects, depends on different diaspora communities and families. Mastering the ability to read and write in Chinese requires memorizing thousands of characters – challenging outside a Chinese-speaking environment that supports it. Unless a system is implemented either by family or through Chinese government organs, the foundations of Chinese identity would require a compensatory doctrinal or emotional medium to replace it.

Another expression of Chinese culture and identity was proposed through the music of Beijing Opera with its many thousands of styles and its interaction with regional and village culture. Though broadly loved, and perhaps an important component, it does not seem to be a sufficient attraction to galvanize a broad Chinese identity.

Business, commerce and economic opportunity seem to be the pervading theme of connectedness between the diaspora and the homeland. Past business deals, support and investment with family and in ancestral villages, the hope of future business opportunities and the desire to ensure opportunities for their children are important factors motivating overseas Chinese to cultivate their cultural, linguistic and historical connection with "Economic China".

The groundswell of requests by representatives of overseas Chinese for the increased involvement of the Chinese government in their life is surprising considering the history of government authoritarianism. It seems to resonate with the reliance on Confucian conceptions of authority to generate culture and suggests the absence of a mechanism of grassroots portable Chinese culture.

This may partly be because there does not exist a long-term mechanism to collect Chinese experiences and a canvas on which to pour collective experiences.<sup>17</sup> The stable structure of the state is still the most referred to medium with the ability to manage Chinese identity.

### Confucianism's Achilles heel

The obvious question why the Chinese Scholarly Tradition (*Ru Jia*) and Confucian scholars did not rise to the challenge of developing, or preserving, a Chinese identity in the diaspora needs to be addressed.

*Keju* Confucian Examination System was set up in the Sui Dynasty around 607CE and reached maturation during the Tang Dynasty (618–907). This system determined the upward mobility of all political hopefuls, scholars and professionals, and was the criterion for the recruitment of officials wishing to enter the state's bureaucracy. It reigned in influence for 1300 years, until its abolition near the end of the Qing Dynasty in 1905. Throughout this period various education systems were experimented with, and different dynasties revised and reformed the models; none the less most preserved the Confucian classics and the commentaries as the fundamental syllabi and the basis for examinations.

Respected in Europe for its efficiency, the *Keju* Confucian Examination System may be credited with bringing China fortune and administrative stability longer than any other political-administrative system on earth. Despite developing a comprehensive range of education, training and scholarly colleges and institutions to disseminate scholarship and techniques in diverse practices from writing, flood-control techniques, military and political tactics, agriculture, music, mathematics, astronomy, calendar calculation, navigation and manufacturing, the *Keju* system and Confucian education in general had an Achilles heel, an inherent problem that would eventually stunt its growth and slow its entry into modernity, namely its dependence on the emperor and institutional hierarchies, its subordination and compliance to ministers and senior bureaucrats.

The Confucian necessity to identify the source of authority may be useful for administrative challenges in China, but debilitating when sensitive questions of loyalty and belonging to a host country arise. The Confucian hegemony lacks the benefits of an adversarial system, debating and challenging authority with checks and balances, while still submitting to its law. Its antecedents in biblical, Talmudic and rabbinic culture, and its development in European countries and in liberal democracies, are founded in a unique dialectic involving doctrine and law, and – as discussed in more detail below – are absent from Confucian dialectic.

European scholarship grew from within the Christian church. Often divided in schism and opposition to governments and monarchs, the church, its orthodox and liberal scholarly wings raised critique, provided checks on each other and on political authority, and competed with government to win the hearts and minds of the people. European scholarly and religious classes were not averse to undermining king, ministers or public officials – a concept deeply offensive to Confucian scholars, one of its greatest ethical virtues being the preservation of the master's authority and the stability of the existing frameworks.

This subservience to central authority, while no doubt ensuring highly skilled and disciplined graduates, had a debilitating effect on intellectual and conceptual growth, trimming innovative talent, discouraging challenge to corrupt authority or ineffective ministry, stymying the potential of students and apprentices to innovate, stunting the iconoclastic streaks of advisors and reducing the administrative genius of officialdom to a non-questioning bureaucracy in the service of political masters. This characteristic deeply ingrained into the Chinese scholarly tradition, aside from its productivity, also had far-reaching and debilitating consequences.<sup>18</sup>

Relevant to the present discussion are a number of related consequences. First, as education was not available to those without aspirations to the bureaucracy, farmers, traders and craftsmen were not educated in the gentleman's sciences synonymous with high Chinese culture. Most of the likely types of emigrants from China were consequently not schooled and unable to articulate an intellectual fusion.

There was rarely an opposition camp of scholars producing non-state-sponsored ideas or services. Hence the entire body of Chinese scholarship revolved around sovereignty and the skills required for its implementation. It would be unlikely that such a framework could hardly expect to produce people who had an interest in living outside China. Confucian scholars had little motive to leave China. Employment away from the sponsorship of the emperor's civil service would be difficult. Confucian ethics would have little meaning in an environment which did not defer to their role. Consequently only small numbers would emigrate, so that the Confucian system, however dominant in China, was hardly known, studied or diffused in the outside world.

In the rare event that a Confucian scholar did find himself in a foreign country, it was likely, according to Confucian ethics, for him to respect the local hierarchy and authority, and raise no challenge to it. In this way, the Confucian response to being a minority in a foreign country may have been to accept the authority of the ruler and his system of ethics and, as long as it was virtuous, assimilate into it. In this respect, a Confucian-Western identity may be expressed in a Chinese immigrant becoming an upright and productive citizen, in the professional or administrative classes of his adopted country.

Being that Confucianism did not see value in religious exclusivism, and commonly practiced Dao, Buddhist and other family rituals concurrently with their scholarly traditions, the Confucians who did settle in Western countries would likely be overwhelmed by the rigidity and intolerance of the biblical tradition and its exclusive demand for singular loyalty to God, specific doctrine and rituals. In many cases Confucian practices would have been scorned and not tolerated. The overt worship of ancestors would specifically not have been welcomed in Islamic or Christian countries. Over time, under these conditions, the more tolerant and flexible worldview of Confucianism would be the point of least resistance and, considering their lack of doctrinal discrimination, Chinese would likely adopt the Christian

or Islamic norms of their host country as they did Daoism or Buddhism, until they or their descendants achieved complete assimilation.

The Confucian system was voluntary for the Confucian gentlemen who understood its noble value, but for simple folk it was an enforced, non-voluntary ethical, administrative and hierarchical structure. The scholarly tradition could hardly grow within a non-centralized environment. If not supported by the wealth, prestige and authority of the emperor, it would not have the wherewithal to muster the necessary energy to enforce itself within a minority environment.

Chinese scholars mastered the Chinese language but were not motivated to master foreign languages in the same way that foreign missionaries and scholars in China did. Habituated in and masters of Chinese norms, they would find it difficult to integrate within a foreign environment. As Confucian thought negated any form of evangelism or missionary activity, not seeing value in outreach or spreading its wisdom beyond those who came to it by choice and in search of personal discipline, Confucian satellite communities rarely existed and Confucian scholars had no gateways or platforms to expose or be exposed to outside influence.

Confucian gentlemen were advised to not go far from their ancestral village; the homeland of their parents was a place of pilgrimage. Filial piety being an important Confucian precept, scholars who traveled far from their parents, so far as to leave China, breached the most basic principle of Confucian thought and committed the equivalent of heresy in Christian terms. In such a way, Confucianism was almost locked into China without the means, motivation, personnel or intellectual constructs to propagate, expand its reaches or fuse it with worldviews outside China.

Confucianism in many ways replaced the need for a religion and a spiritual discipline. Nurturing scholars and professionals by a behavioral ethic, creating a mechanism for interaction and movement between them and the farming, manufacturing and commercial classes, freely allowing the practice of personal rituals, Confucianism catered to the spiritual needs of the people in its own way. In many respects bureaucrats operated in the role of priest or rabbi. Some preached, advised, taught and served as a noble class to be honored and respected. The size of this priestly class was larger than anything in European, Christian or Muslim lands. Yet despite or because of its effectiveness it was impotent abroad.

Several ironies exist. The Confucian as an individual or a small community outside China would hardly dare advocate the Chinese political system with loyalty to the emperor, so the next alternative was to recognize the existing political structure as his ethical focus and assimilate into the higher professional rungs of the host country – not in defeat or in concession, but as an expression of his Confucian ethic, thus losing (or fulfilling) his Confucian identity within the space of a generation.

Confucianism succeeded so effectively in China, achieving near-hegemony, integrating and becoming synonymous with the Chinese state, that it was

unable to strip itself of its national identity and unable to develop the skills (an abstract, denationalized theology) to proliferate into other national contexts and adapt outside its conceptual birthplace. In many ways it remained, even after two thousand years of development, a relatively immature religio-spiritual ethical system. This last century saw its decline, and the next decades will see it either reconstruct itself using principles developed by the monotheistic religions, or teeter on the verge of extinction.

The Confucian system neutralized the need for religion by proving a stable analytical, socio-intellectual and administrative structure that was capable of accommodating and slowly adjusting other ideologies and showing itself to be profoundly self-sufficient and sustainable on a par with and in many ways superior to any administrative-political-doctrinal paradigms conceived elsewhere in the world. Another way of looking at it is that it severed the scholarly and elite classes, the nutrients of religio-doctrinal movements, from the sources of authority, so that they remained harmless and pliable under its arching canopy.

The result was that the dialectic between foreign ideas and the Chinese Scholarly Tradition did not involve an exchange on the method of interpretation itself; it did not permit the hierarchical structures, so effectively used throughout Chinese social life, to be negotiated or challenged. It merely absorbed ideas within to the structure. It absorbed; it did not integrate. In many respects the existing civilizational dialogue and exchange between China and the West cannot be said to amount to a meaningful synthesis of key assets – rather a selective, perhaps even cynical process of assimilating and absorbing specifically useful content.

It is the structural rigidity of the Confucian system which precipitated bitter attacks by Chinese reformers and revolutionaries in the first half of the twentieth century. The feeling that no paradigm shift and great change would be possible in China so long as the rigid Confucian interpretive structure remained united the nationalists and communists and many segments of the Chinese intelligentsia. All these parties seem to be returning to the bosom of the state-sponsored convention; and, while proposing new components to the dialectic, these are in themselves constructed without complete independence of the Confucian paradigms, causing an asymmetric, irregular and self-preserving dynamic.

None the less, great development in China was achieved, as Confucianism took a brief hiatus giving time and opportunity for nationalism and socialism to contend for dominion. It is arguably apparent that, despite its hiatus, the structural core of the Confucian system was still active during the periods of the nationalists and the rise of the People's Republic of China, not too far under the surface, its interpretive and administrative paradigms continually manifested, neutralizing the need for axiomatic change in the Chinese dialectical structures. Its brief hibernation may have been long enough for socialists to import a number of important ideas and doctrines, chief amongst them a form of universalism inherent in socialist theory. This subject is

discussed below, but may prove to be a critical component of a future dialectic on Chinese identity. After a brief time, it seems that the Confucian undergrowth reasserted itself and is slowly enveloping the existing reins of state. The most poignant example of this today is the status of Chinese scholarship, universities and research institutes. While in ideas, methodological forms and content these are not Confucian, none the less they have been steadfastly beholden to the central authorities, or to the academic industries which are in turn beholden to the central authorities, and are invariably confined to the devastating limitations this entails.

In the past decades several conditions have developed for new and even revolutionary Confucian structures to take root: the growth of an educated Chinese diaspora and the need to find a non-political Chinese identity; the rigorous exchange between Chinese and foreign universities; high levels of education for all Chinese; the internationalism of Chinese officials born of its economic success and international responsibilities; the reaction of people to rampant materialism and the desire to reclaim an ethical and spiritual fabric.

### **Systemic hegemony as the quintessential “Chinese characteristic”**

The role religion played in the development of non-Asian countries is similar to the role Confucianism played in China’s development. With a longevity equal to that of Judaism and Buddhism, its trans-generational resilience against competing ideologies, absorbing the influences of other ideologies, and permeating disparate components of Chinese civilization, is impressive.

Sir Robert K. Douglas (1838–1913), Professor of Chinese at King’s College London, in his study of Confucianism, remarked:

upward of forty generations of Chinamen have been absolutely subjected to the dicta of one man . . . a plain matter of fact system of morality, such as enunciated by Confucius, was sufficient for all the wants of the Chinese.

He continued to attribute this to their “eminently phlegmatic and unspeculative mind”.

It does not seem that the “unspeculative mind”, as supposed by Sir Robert, is the ultimate reason for the rejection of religion and doctrine as the foundation of Chinese civilization, so much as the effectiveness of the Confucian system in catering to the administrative and emotional needs of the spectrum of Chinese class structures. Its influence was so encompassing and inclusive, spanning generations, permeating and providing structure for ideologies and vogues throughout Chinese history, and continues to do so in the present, even insinuating itself within the structure of its staunchest critics and movements which emerged to wage battle against it, that the best term to describe it is “systemic” – “pertaining to the general system, or the body as a whole”.<sup>19</sup>



It would be incorrect to argue that China's attempt to seal itself off hermetically from foreign influences, or its unwillingness to incorporate other intellectual or religious ideas into its thought, is cause for stagnation. Chinese identity has fused with foreign systems over the millennia, including with Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Kaifeng Judaism, industrialization, modern science, Marxism, capitalism and popular materialism. But, as they entered China, they underwent a fascinating transformation or "sinicization". More than its relative isolation, it is the specific manner in which it assimilated and sinicized that may be the source of China's bemoaned stagnation.

The absorptive/assimilatory abilities of Systemic China are remarkable. The gradual sinocization of Indian Buddhism, becoming what are now the quintessential expressions of *tiantai*, *huayuan* and *chan* schools, is testament to its ability not to repress an ideology, or confront it directly, but gradually to endow it with features and inter-connectivity with the rest of Chinese life, not through doctrinal suggestion but through behavior and subtle forms of structure unique to Confucian culture.

Realization of the advantages and strength of cultural assimilation over occupation of territory dates back to the rivalry between the minority Chinese state of Yi (or *manyi*, or *yidi* minorities) in central China and the Xia (*huaxia* now signifying the cultural civilization of China), and is recorded in the Analects. Confucius believed that, even though *yidi* occupied a strategic location in the center of China's territory, owing to its cultural force *huaxia* was none the less superior. Confucius said: "The states of *yidi* are inferior to the states of *huaxia*, even though they (the former) have retained their princes while *huaxia* sometimes has not."<sup>20</sup> Mencius was more clear: "I heard that only Yi has been assimilated into Xia, but never heard that Yi ever succeeded to change Xia."<sup>21</sup>

Invading Khitans, Jurchens, Mongols, Manchus were politically absorbed and inversely assimilated to become legitimate Chinese dynasties of Liao (907–1125), Jin (1115–1234), Yuan (1279–1368) and Qing (1644–1912) in a remarkable feat, akin to a form of inverted evangelism, a reverse stranglehold achieved wherein the invading armies into China, instead of promulgating their own cultures, were sinocized and became willing media to disseminate the invaded country's culture. Perhaps the analogy of a pollinating bee is more descriptive; believing it ravishes the flower and takes its assets, it is actually pollinating the flower. Whereas missionaries acculturate and indoctrinate a country they settle, the sinocization process acts in reverse, the Confucian framework "systemicizes" the invading group to the degree that it is hardly identified as ever having originated from a foreign source or ever been a challenge to the reigning order.

The genius of Systemic China, together with its Achilles heel, is not in its insulation from other cultures, but in the manner in which it processes and integrates other cultures. The uniqueness of systemicizing, as opposed to evangelizing or colonizing, is key to the manner in which China's long-term identity has been structured.

Over the past thousand years, Muslims in China have forged mixed identities more successfully than Han Chinese immigrants outside China. Where Islam succeeded in dominating many regions and countries, including several Asian countries, it was unable to make such significant headway in China. Despite considerable motivation and attempts to islamize China, Confucianism prevailed with relatively little (compared with Europe and the Middle East) direct confrontation or conflict. Over a slow process, Islam in China was sinocized. Confucian-style Islam testifies to the durability of China's unique method and, in this case, provides a fascinating demonstration of the potential synthesis of Islam with other cultures. For our purposes, it demonstrates the Chinese method of systemic accommodation, not its insulation, as supposed by revolutionary Chinese movements, being the underlying feature running throughout Chinese national identity. The efforts by international Islamic bodies to draw Chinese Muslims away from its union with Chinese culture will undoubtedly test the core factors of Islam and Systemic China, and deserves greater attention.<sup>22</sup>

Although numerically small, the fate of the Jewish community that existed in what was China's imperial capital, Kaifeng, from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries and beyond is also an indicator of the nature of Systemic China. Discussed in more detail elsewhere in this book, the Jewish community, numbering at its largest only a few thousand, survived for over a thousand years, in near-isolation from the rest of the Jewish world. Even today, Kaifeng Jewish descendants attest to their mixed Jewish and Han Chinese identities. The ability to survive in near-isolation for so long is unprecedented in Jewish history (though myths of lost Israelite tribes are more widespread) and may be attributed not to Jewish determination but to the systemic nature of Chinese life, which permitted and encouraged variety and absorbed it into its own life force, but insisted that this be done using Chinese characteristics: dress, Chinese language and habits. Systemic China is tolerant, but hegemonic, in that it permitted sub-cultures to exist through it but not in defiance of it. The Jewish community, with a history of adaptation, excelled at fusing its identity with Confucian culture and built its synagogue in a traditional Confucian architecture; its members excelled in Confucian Imperial Examinations and took on ancestor worship and wrote apologetics testifying to the sameness of Judaism with Confucianism.<sup>23</sup> In Jonathan Lipman's translation of the vertical stone tablets in the courtyard of the Kaifeng synagogue inscribed in 1489 by a Jew, Jin Zhang, who had achieved a rank in the civil service of the Ming Dynasty's bureaucracy, he fuses Chinese terminology with Jewish ideas and quotes the Chinese classics instead of the Jewish classics and engarbs Judaism within Confucian terms and contends that the Jewish community had a natural compatibility with Chinese moral codes, and the way was paved for the community to be preserved and protected within the Confucian system.

The most aware expression of this feature of Chinese identity was articulated by Deng Xiaoping; "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics".<sup>24</sup> Socialism, being

a Western ideology and containing fundamentals which were axiomatically different from the course of Chinese life, was none the less imported and celebrated in China, testifying to China's susceptibility to foreign influences.

However, the Chinese way of fusing was distinct and unlike the Western method of synthesis. It had two components. The first was the important art of "giving face" to the nation's pride and enjoining the sense that Chinese culture was, despite everything, superior. China had not succumbed to foreign influence but only borrowed valuable ideas to be used within its own paradigms. For these foreign ideas to achieve their penultimate application, they required the final touches of sinocization.

The second component of sinocization was the necessary lip-service that a foreign influence was required to pay to the supreme transcendental "being" of the state cum the embodiment of Chinese superior culture. Kowtowing to Chinese tradition, reaching accommodations with the Confucian system, becoming subordinate, and deferring to the hierarchical and cultural order as the ultimate ethical value is still, to date, the only insurance for trans-generational survival within the Chinese reality.

A little-noticed scholar of Chinese history and behavior Ray Huang (Chinese name: Huang Renyu), wrote a monumental book entitled *1587: A Year of No Significance. The Ming Dynasty in Decline*, winning the 1983 American Book Award for a history paperback, argued that the government entirely dismissed the realities of the people and conformed to Confucianism lacking any other mechanism to maintain consistency and uniformity with the people.<sup>25</sup> His perspective was particularly interesting as he was a secretary to the National Party leaders before he migrated to the United States and began his studies as a mature student at the University of Michigan in 1954. His observation of events in the Ming Dynasty are born of his critique of the same feature of Chinese governance in the fight between communists and nationalists in which 30 million people died.

This sharply contrasts with Jewish intellectual foundations, which refer to the law in much the same way as Chinese refer to authority. Being that circumstances and countries changed for Jews over the eras, the portability of the law, its continual application to new circumstance, its more tangible nature and its predisposition to dialectical exchange made it a stable but adjustable mechanism to transport and contain Jewish identity over millennia. While the Chinese Scholarly Tradition has done the same, its mass and its sluggishness make it ill-adjusted to innovation, and adamant that all exchange must be done on its home ground, by its rules. The reality of statehood is such that the system is not exposed to the same degree of innovation and dynamism extant in non-state, inter-state or trans-state experiences.

In the case of socialism, a fascinating transformation occurred. Emerging as a leader of the challenge against Confucianism and the feudalism of the Chinese Scholarly Tradition, the exponents of communism overcame and savagely oppressed and persecuted any semblance of Confucianism; the Great Cultural Revolution (1966–76) being its *pièce de résistance*. Within a decade,

under Deng Xiaoping, tell-tale signs of coming to accommodations with Confucianism surfaced, and the present socialist regime stops short of openly championing Confucian structures. A remarkable turnaround consistent with the indelible durability of Systemic China has occurred, albeit with some variations and dialectical additions, discussed later.

One of the fascinating phenomena observed in Mao Zedong's fierce efforts to uproot the vestiges of Confucianism is that it resulted in his being viewed as the inheritor of the systemic structures that until then supported Confucianism. While succeeding to some degree in removing the object of the Confucian loyalty, he himself became the subject of its continual inertia, with his popularity reaching a frenzy. Mao did not destroy the Confucian structure; he replaced the object of Chinese loyalty with the party, and destroyed those who challenged the new deity. Systemic China was barely scratched by his "revolutionary" efforts.

The main impetus behind the argument for "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" was the difficulty the state experienced in implementing pure socialist doctrine. Requiring a mechanism to cope with the incompatibility of a theoretical ideal with political and economic reality, lacking Western prisms, philosophical dialectics, theological polemics, political debate to adjust, dilute, or reform the theory, the navigators of the state reverted to what was still intuitive to them; to systematize socialism. By sinocizing socialism, the state relegated it to a more appropriate place within the Chinese hierarchy where it would not be a source of tension or challenge to the realities encountered. To give it "face", by glorifying it, endowing it with respect and deference, at the same time placing it within a more maneuverable ranking, was the ultimate reversion to Systemic China – allowing socialism to exist within the form dictated by Chinese tradition.

While in any event having dramatic influence in its first three decades, socialist doctrine none the less did not become the prism through which events over the next generation of Chinese existence could be interpreted; instead it was itself interpreted, classified and typeset within a Chinese/Confucian system, where its potency was limited and it could do as little harm as possible. This is what is meant by endowing socialism with "Chinese characteristics".

The reversion to Systemic China causes some of the most fertile intellectual ingredients and stimulatory agents inherent in foreign religious, doctrinal and ideological systems to be extracted, neutralized or dismissed. Only components which were readily assimilatory could be used within the higher rungs of the system. The components posing challenges to the hierarchical core were necessarily screened out. The portability of the Western "idea" was sacrificed on the altar of China's "systemic" temple.

Terms such as "hanification" and "sinofication" are in vogue today in contemporary China. Intellectuals and artists support sinocization of foreign-influenced culture as a necessary rite of passage of foreign ideas, products and culture to be accepted. Where the May Fourth Movement argued for a rejection of sinocization as the cause of China's backwardness, arguing for

an uncompromising embrace of Westernization as the only way to extricate China from the grasp of Confucian feudalism, the diametric opposite view is now hailed as the most patriotic and correct.

### **Transforming models of Chinese identities**

The question what constitutes Chineseness – race, language, history, ideology, spirituality, common experiences, common territory, or other less tangible structures and fusions of cultural and racial components – is subject to much contemplation, and no clear formula has yet been offered.

The belief that Chinese are descendants of the Yellow Emperor, that they emerged from the Wei tributary of the Yellow River, and therefore share the same biological and territorial origins, has been an important, if not critical, part of Chinese identity. This ethnic group's ability continuously to expand outwards, as Tu We-ming puts it, "from the centre to the periphery", until dominion over the whole of China, is believed to be the most important testament to the superiority of its culture of "dressing, eating, dwelling and traveling". The belief that this domination was achieved without resistance as the barbarians recognized their cultural superiority is testament to the prowess of the Chinese Scholarly Tradition, forming a fusion between culture, ethnicity and administration which has become deeply rooted in Chinese consciousness. Even though scholars convincingly refute this theory of Chinese origins, it none the less remains deeply rooted.<sup>26</sup> This association with territory is replicated in diaspora contexts as the affiliations of overseas Chinese to their region and/or city of origin together with the culture that emanates from them, as a primary source of pride and identity.

Language is also perceived to be one of the important and even critical components of Chineseness. Tu Wei-ming makes an interesting observation about the function of Chinese language in preserving historical memory: "this cumulative tradition is preserved in Chinese characters, a script separable from and thus unaffected by phonological transmutations". This observation also applies to Arabic and Hebrew, in which different dialects and pronunciations in the oral form did not affect the written form, enjoining diverse dialects, regions, cultural differences to a common history and medium of communication and transmission of identity.

In the 1980s, Su Xiaokang, in his six-part Chinese television documentary series *River Elegy* (河殇 *heshang*), suggested that the reason for Chinese cultural backwardness and its humiliations was rooted in its quest for insularity.<sup>27</sup> He gave the example of the building of the Great Wall by China's first emperor, Ying Zheng, which isolated it, and the Ming Dynasty's ban on maritime activities. He argued that China's land-based civilization was defeated by maritime civilizations that explored and were open to developments of modern sciences. The point he made was that the self-preserving system used in the past was bringing shame on the people. He identified the dragon, the Great Wall and the river as Chinese symbols that needed to be revised and

new symbols adopted. While his argument was tragically insightful and had great influence on the democratic movement to open up to Western influence, none the less it may have misdiagnosed the problem. It was not the insulation of China that was to blame, but systemicization. In misdiagnosing the problem, the hope to construct a more dynamic Chinese identity would have little chance.

Over several periods of Chinese history, energetic, passionate attempts to reform partially succeeded but were eventually curbed and institutionalized within the over-arching colossus of the age-old and tried Chinese hierarchical structure. All these, except the May Fourth Movement, are attributable to not fully understanding the dynamics in play.

The history of the Chinese education system is a fascinating reflection of the struggles to alter the methodological axis of Chinese identity via the reform of the university syllabus. One of Confucianism's most important instruments was its method of education and the way incentives were offered to scholars in return for their loyalty. Instilled, almost hardwired, it created a beholden bind on the public servant-scholar to preserve the hand that feeds him as sacrosanct and untouchable. Contemplation, study and criticism were encouraged, but not of the system.

Between the 1860s and 1900, the Westernization Movement, using the motto "Chinese substance and Western application",<sup>28</sup> brought Western-style education to China. New schools emerged including foreign-language schools, military schools and technology schools. These were still run under what has been criticized as a feudal style. This initiative none the less maintained that Chinese culture was superior and that Western imperialism was barbaric. They did not confront the Systemic China syndrome or, as Tu Wei-ming calls it, "the Middle Kingdom syndrome" which "may have made it psychologically difficult for the Chinese leadership to abandon its sense of superiority as the centre".<sup>29</sup>

The abhorrence of imperialism deeply inset into Chinese thought has a manifold complexity; the fear that foreign thoughts can infiltrate China is a looming existential threat; the reality that foreign ideologies and armies have infiltrated created a reality, and an ethical response to them emerged in the rejection of barbaric imperialism; the Confucian worldview's emphasis on personal discipline naturally rejected the hopes associated with universalism and its by-product imperialism. The perception that Chinese already possessed the "center" devalued the need for reaching out to the peripheries. In the age of internationalism and the global village, universalism is an important component of a national identity and useful in the preservation of the ever-increasing nomadic identity required of travelers, cosmopolitan and world citizens and immigrants. Without it, overseas Chinese are handicapped in their ability to belong.

In 1898 the "Hundred Day Reform" led by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, deeply influenced by Western ideas, sought to change the feudal system, set up a constitutional monarchy, set up new types of industry, develop a



capitalist economy, change the way of selecting leaders and bureaucrats, and prioritize the study of Western culture.<sup>30</sup> The Jing Shi Da Xue Tang and local schools introduced the study of Western disciplines in addition to Chinese studies. Students were sent abroad to study, institutions were set up to translate and edit foreign textbooks and other literature. This created a sharp debate and conflict with the ruling class.

Cai Yuanpei, the first chancellor of Peking University, and other educationalists at the beginning of the twentieth century, sought to forge new constructs for Chinese identity. Cai advocated “integrating the local culture, with contemporary circumstances and internationalism” without any limitations or influence by despotism and combining the vogue European precepts of “liberty, equality, fraternity” with the Confucius morality “kindness, righteousness, forgiveness” to cultivate a more fully integrated Chinese adapting to the “real society” and “achieve a higher state of the spirit”. However, the principles of this axis did not extricate the educated classes from dependency on the over-arching axis of spirituality linked with the state.

The May Fourth Movement of 1919 remains one of the most fascinating and daring attempts to revolutionize China. Until then and since then, there has been nothing so iconoclastic and far-reaching to emerge in Chinese intellectual life. Even though the achievements of the democratic movement preceding Tiananmen Square may have led to the progressive opening up of communist China and paved the way to its present openness, none the less the modern forces behind democratic and modern China do not carry the seeds for a far-reaching universalization of Chinese identity. The May Fourth patriots in many ways come closest to resembling the dynamics extant in several important Jewish reform, secularizing and even messianic movements, in their attempts to alter the structures which controlled and guided their destiny.<sup>31</sup> This subject requires more attention than available here; suffice to say that the May Fourth’s idea to reject Chinese culture, Chinese ethics, thought, behavior, even Chinese language, as an essential part of shedding the garments of feudalism, was not anti-Chinese. On the contrary, proud of their ethnicity and racial bonds, they were motivated by the conviction that the universalization of China, claiming its position as one of the great civilizations of the world, could only take place when the material and local form of Chineseness embodied in Systemic China yielded and was informed and molded by other stimuli, not possible under the current stranglehold of the Confucian system. They heralded the smashing of Systemic China and the adoption of ideas, not hierarchical hegemony, as the medium for China’s emergence into modernity. Needless to say, this movement failed in its entirety, with little remnants, systemized, its current incarnation in contemporary Chinese academia, bearing a feeble resemblance in some of its rhetoric, but not in its most important component, the rejection of Chinese “systemic” character.

The struggle to break the interpretive constructs inherent in the Chinese Scholarly Tradition continues, and has led to revolution and struggle and



some of the most devastating periods of Chinese history; none the less the Confucian model persists, and revolutionary currents are seen as temporary tangents invariably reabsorbed and co-opted back into the machinery of state. The hegemony and all-encompassing structure realized by the structural permeability of the Chinese Scholarly Tradition is on a par with the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings which upheld many monarchies of Europe. The Confucian equivalent is extant in modern Chinese internal and foreign policy as surely as it was in the dynasties of the past, echoed in the One China Policy and in the party's determination to be viewed as the only legitimate and rightful source of Chinese authority and the sole conduit through which loyalty to state is expressed.

Mou Zongsan, a mainland Chinese scholar who moved to Taiwan in his late forties, made valiant efforts to reconstruct Confucianism to speak to modernity and position it as a part of world philosophy. He took who he believed was the representative champion of modern Western philosophy and of human enlightenment, Emmanuel Kant, as his sparring partner and tried to synthesize Confucian thought with Kantian principles. In so doing, he became one of the most renowned scholars of Confucianism in his time. Mou's collected works span thirty-two volumes. He influenced future generations of Neo- and New Confucians. His greatest achievement perhaps was to extricate the systemic nature of Confucianism and render it compatible with Western philosophical dialectic. Whether his efforts will have long-term influence on the nature of Confucianism is still not clear, but no doubt his contribution to future philosophic exchange within philosophical prisms is indisputable.<sup>32</sup>

A window of opportunity existed for educated Chinese emigrants who fanned out over the world and away from the reaches of Chinese hegemony to develop other formulas of Chinese spirituality and ethical association. From the 1980s till today, great strides were made to conceive of innovative synthesis. It is conceivable that this period is coming to a close as the majority of overseas Chinese, charmed by China's economic success, are likely to resign themselves to the interpretations of China's incumbent system.

If this is so, it is unlikely, despite efforts, that overseas Chinese identity could produce a meaningful and over-arching dialectic to accommodate the growing diversity of overseas Chinese characteristics. After a period of a generation or two, China-born Chinese living abroad and second-generation overseas Chinese, distanced from the political realities in China, ignorant of Chinese history, language, culture, will find little relevance in China's dialectical constructs and are more likely either to radicalize in a form of nationalism that compensates for their growing distance from their ethnic identity, or to steadily assimilate within their host country's culture as they have in the past.

Tu Wei-ming provides a number of useful and important models for understanding Chinese identity. His work requires greater discussion than is

permitted here. His initial contention that Chinese identity is motivated in a sense of “marginality, rootlessness, amnesia, anger, frustration, alienation, and helplessness . . . characterizing the collective psyche of the modern Chinese”,<sup>33</sup> describes the by-products of systemization, not the identity of the Chinese per se.

The mainland Chinese identity has barely evolved in the thousands of years of its existence, and only on the periphery (Chinese diasporas and lands under foreign occupation) has it had a chance to be exposed to stimulatory factors important in its philosophical maturation. The sense of rootlessness and frustration he describes is not because China has undergone a more severe colonization than other nations, but because it was unable to adjust to it like other nations. The attempts to compare China's occupation by the Japanese, however cruel and inhumane it was, to the Nazi Holocaust seem to me another example of the Middle Kingdom syndrome and of the need to sinocize an event of singular severity into a Chinese prism, even if the Chinese did not share the same circumstance or severity.<sup>34</sup>

It is worth considering that the development of a modern Chinese identity has little to do with China itself, but with the need of Western nations to categorize other nations and minorities using their own prisms. It is also possible that the natural proclivity of Western multiculturalism to encourage the adoption of otherness as an identity is the primary factor for the apparent hunt for an overseas Chinese identity. Ironically, Western multiculturalism, more than any facility within traditional Chinese thinking, is championing the preservation of overseas Chinese identity.

One of Tu Wei-ming's important propositions is that “as Chinese culture disintegrates at the centre, it can be revived from the periphery”. The periphery, where Chinese people encounter “the other”, is the starting point of a gradual transformation of the center. In doing so, he legitimizes the potency of a universalism which can inform the particularism of the center. He continues to describe three symbolic universes which represent the entirety of Chinese experience.

The first is the traditional lands of China, where Chinese majorities live and form a Chinese culture: mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore.

The second is the lands where Chinese are a minority, from Malaysia to America, where their unique experiences have the potential to inform the center. Here he identifies the Chinese diaspora as an important component of Chinese identity, if not at present, then for the development of a future Chinese identity.

The third symbolic universe, and the most innovative component of his formulation consists of individuals, such as scholars, teachers, journalists, industrialists, traders, entrepreneurs, and writers, who try to understand China intellectually and bring their conceptions of China to their own linguistic communities. For the last four decades the international discourse on

cultural China has unquestionably been shaped by the third symbolic universe more than by the first two combined. Specifically, writings in English and in Japanese have had a greater impact on the intellectual discourse on cultural China than those written in Chinese.

In recognizing a non-ethnic Chinese component to Chinese identity, Professor Tu plants the seeds for fertile discussion on universal dimensions of Chinese identity. The non-ethnic, non-linguistic, non-territorial component of this “symbolic universe”, the concession that an intellectual, political, philosophical dimension to Chinese identity has been active and creative in the formation of modern China, and has come primarily from Westerners, throws a spanner into the works of the existing prisms of Chinese identity. But it is this possibility, and the implications thereof, that gives hope for third-, fourth- and fifth-generation Chinese identity.

The absence of a mechanism for foreigners to identify as Chinese is illustrated in the reality of the foreign expatriate communities in Chinese cities. While there are some foreigners who moved to China to embrace communism, Buddhism, Confucianism or Chinese alternative health practices, this phenomenon is hardly the norm. Those who did so were rapidly shifted back into a Western non-Chinese orientation. Not able to integrate into governance or into the machinery of state, not sharing the political history of the country, unable to participate in the brand of family-oriented ethics, they find it hard to integrate fully or become Chinese in any way conceivable. Indications exist that those foreigners moving to China, eager to learn Chinese language and history, are, despite their valiant efforts, rebuffed back into their own culture and ideas, and their original culture is reinforced in their eyes. From observations and discussions with a cross-section of foreigners living in China, there is a sense that the longer they remain in China, the more reactionary to Chinese culture they seem to become. Though this subject needs more empirical investigation, the absence of a doctrinal conduit into Chinese culture may be the cause of an impasse and a significant obstacle in what could have become a genuine, meaningful and creative dialectic. If the Chinese dialectic remains in its current format, it will not be able to accommodate foreigners in any meaningful way, and its ambitions as a universal civilization would be severely hampered.

The potential for presently excluded groups of Chinese-related people such as expatriates, journalists, traders and sinophiles to identify with China via an intellectual or emotional relationship is the most valuable outcome of Tu Wei-ming’s “third symbolic universe” theory. Though it seems far from being achieved in reality, its theoretical articulation paves the way for the development of a sinophilic association (at least symbolically) which, in synthesis with other wings of Tu’s “periphery”, may generate a complex inertia necessary to attend to the challenges in waiting.

Tu’s idea of a broad “Cultural China” is achieved by the doctrinization of “Experiential China”. This is an intellectual exercise that Jews have been

through repeatedly in countless contexts. The ability to project a more ephemeral, less tangible quality on to the experience of nationhood is a first step to a more accessible cultural association. Ironically, and in contrast to Judaism, the doctrinization of Chineseness manifests itself in a form of secularization of Chinese tradition, where Chinese food preparation and dining, Chinese culture, ethnicity, regional association, family relations, festivals, even language, are not necessary requirements for Chineseness.

The ability of Jews and Chinese to undergo the same processes (doctrinization and secularization) and achieve the opposite results is a subject of fascination also worthy of greater discussion and understanding within sociological and philosophical paradigms.

The Jewish dialectic with Chinese identity, or rather the dialectic between “Jewish symbolic universes” and “Chinese symbolic universes”, as Tu Weiming would call them, crosses the board and intersects Chinese life on many levels. The following are several examples:

The existence of a small Jewish minority living in Kaifeng for over a thousand years raises a theoretical challenge to how Chinese define minorities, which in turn is contingent on the traditional Chinese notions of nationhood and identity. This subject has been discussed elsewhere.<sup>35</sup>

The existence of a Jewish community in Harbin and Shanghai, and the influence of Iraqi, Russian and German Jewish communities over several hundred years, together with several hundred Jewish foreign experts who remained in China during its most turbulent periods, including some who became prominent and well known in the highest political echelons, has effects which will continue to be unraveled over the next decades.<sup>36</sup>

The influence of Christianity in China, the representation of Jews in the Christian mind, the evangelical–Israeli alliance, and the general reconciliation of Christianity with Judaism continues to affect the dialectic between the Chinese and Jewish symbolic universes.

The influence of the Bible has been and continues to be significant.<sup>37</sup>

The influence of Jewish writers who have been translated into Chinese for at least a hundred years continues to contribute to the dialectic.<sup>38</sup>

The role of Marxism and its Jewish components will continue to contribute to a fascinating Jewish–Chinese dialectic and a reconstruction of Chinese identity.<sup>39</sup>

The role of Jews who constitute some of the leading international scholars, journalists, pioneers of Chinese-related issues, who by constituting a significant portion of Tu’s third symbolic universe may in time be recognized as having contributed a meaningful Jewish perspective on China’s struggle to define a modern identity.

The challenge raised by Jews presently living in China to be recognized as a legitimate religion, community and component of modern Chinese life.

The role of Jewish Studies in Chinese universities and amongst Chinese scholars and writers in the reconstruction of Chinese culture and identity.

The impact of the Jewish reputation for excellence and the prevailing success of the Jewish diaspora on Chinese policy-makers as they consider how to position identity in the coming decade.

The meeting of Jews and Chinese in China and in the diasporas has grown significantly, and this has had significant influence in many areas, the effects of which will only be fully understood in future decades. Common interests, professions, circumstances, mixed marriages, professional collaborations and the emerging phenomenon of Chinese babies adopted into Jewish families are only some of the avenues for synthesis of identities.<sup>40</sup>

### **The emergence of Chinese Christianity**

The possibility for a Chinese–Christian fusion began with the efforts of Matteo Ricci and Adam Schall von Bell to find the right balance between Chinese, Christian and worldly identity. Intending to share its benefits, Christian missionaries from the 1600s brought with them Western sciences – medicine, astronomy, calendar-calculation techniques, mathematics and geography – and duly impressed some Chinese intelligentsia, Confucian élites and scholars. Though the sciences were eagerly embraced by the emperor, the doctrinal components of the Christian message were not met with the same enthusiasm. It seemed that the realities of pre-twenty-first-century China did not necessitate or warrant the trans-territorial, trans-political identity offered in Christianity. Over centuries of debate, accommodation, tension, conflict and concessions to missionaries, a fused identity was forged. This identity has emerged as a medium of Chinese spirituality enveloping itself in Chinese language and pride and renewed ethical approaches to life, and generally championing Chinese cultural preservation. Perhaps one of the most impressive payoffs for missionaries was the association formed of Christianity with modernity and science and worldliness, which in turn paved the way for a Chinese Christian identity amongst those migrating to the West. The synthesis with Christianity, not dissimilar to Buddhism's proliferation in the third to sixth centuries, may only reach its most successful realization as the Chinese diaspora sheds political and national associations with China and stakes itself on more flexible models of spirituality.

In his book *Chinese Christians in America*, Yang Fenggang, Professor of Sociology at Perdue University, presents surprisingly high percentages of Chinese immigrants to American cities adopting Christianity (in some cases as high as 30 percent) against an unexpectedly low number of Chinese preserving Buddhist rites and culture (in the same case, 10 percent).<sup>41</sup> These figures have fascinating implications and seem to indicate the willingness of Chinese immigrants to make conceptual leaps and changes in intellectual, religious and ideological matters, and express, transform, fuse and diversify Chinese identity with Western constructs by taking on the religious format of the host country. For the past several decades Chinese have experimented with the possibility of preserving an identity and celebrating Chinese culture

and language within the doctrinal and religious context of Christianity. There are many reasons to speculate why these immigrants adopted Christianity in relatively high numbers rather than adjusting Daoism, Buddhism, family deities and superstitions and of course Confucianism to their new way of life. The general usefulness of doctrine as an identity marker over ethnic or political mediums is the primary motive, a subject requiring more attention than permitted here. However, it also becomes evident that Chinese wish to maintain their own cultural preferences, in their food preparation and consumption patterns, use of Chinese language, establishing Chinese enclaves. Christianity has learned to accommodate this.

Yang Fenggang observes that Chinese churches and church attendees are integrated in all levels of American society, and are not resident in Chinese enclaves, suggesting that the doctrinal component of their identity replaces and compensates for the territorial absence of togetherness.

He also notes (and attempts himself) a Christian theology of Daoism and argues that the "Chinese Christian church has become an institutional base for passing on transformed Confucian values to younger generations".<sup>42</sup>

Today, China faces a situation in which it lacks other widely accepted and effective moralizing agents. The family, village and neighborhood all have been seriously weakened, first by socialism and then by urbanization; socialist values are seriously discredited; Confucianism as a philosophy lacks an organized mass base; and variants of Buddhism and folk religion have not proved to be modernizing agents.<sup>43</sup>

This gap in civic education of course is not news to Chinese leaders. Social critics and scholars have long pointed out the crisis in public morality. This is one reason for the Chinese state's new interest in Confucianism. In 2007, a book on Confucian ethics became a bestseller and an overnight sensation until it was discovered that the government had heavily subsidized the purchase of the book. In many respects the government realizes that patriarchal Confucianism, monastic Buddhism and state socialism are inadequate to meet the spiritual needs of the modern individual and the single-child nuclear family.

Could Christianity play a leading moral role in China's post-industrial, post-communist society, as it once did in its early industrial modernizing society? Sociologist Richard Madsen from the University of California San Diego is pessimistic. His studies of isolated Roman Catholic villages suggest that they are still steeped in the martyr mentality of the underground church.<sup>44</sup> Rural traditions have produced a typical Chinese attraction to millenarian, miracle-producing faiths. From this comes the hope among some Chinese Christian dissidents that their activism will weaken the socialist state in China, as it once did in Eastern Europe. He also sees "the sinofication of Christianity" as leading to a fragmented church, in which the Christian faith is appropriated by many different groups for many different purposes. Given the wide variety of Chinese Christian doctrinal practices and organizational styles, in Madsen's view, Chinese society in general and turbulent Christian communities in

particular are returning to the early-twentieth-century fragmentation Maoists tried to overcome.

By contrast, historian Daniel Bays of Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, is more optimistic. His research on early-twentieth-century Protestantism leads him to conclude that the rise of Christianity in China is a force compatible with the nature and needs of modern society. He sees Chinese Christian churches meeting basic human needs with social services, urban middle-class Protestants taking an increased interest in local civic life, and Chinese Christian professionals working to establish stable family lives. He also notes that studies around the world of Pentecostals steeped in allegedly pre-modern faith-healing and other charismatic practices demonstrate that they have actually helped smooth the way for a successful adaptation to the strains of economic modernization.<sup>45</sup>

Can Chinese Christianity help fill that gap? Surveys of the new middle class find greater interest in self-enrichment activities like travel, training and sport than in religious and charitable pursuits. Some believe that Protestantism has potential: it provides a moral framework for individuals, gives them a “higher” purpose than just making money, provides greater stability within family life, and stems the tide of negative social values, all the while helping Chinese identify with global modernity.

### **Building a Chinese Jerusalem and a centralized spiritual identity**

Aware of the vacuum in Chinese spiritual life left by the Cultural Revolution and the absence of a universal symbol to unite overseas and local Chinese alike, informed by increased openness to the West, and of the strategic usefulness of religion and spirituality in forming a stable national identity based on Confucian teachings, with a mind to develop a world civilization which stands proudly alongside the great powers and worldviews of the twenty-first century, Chinese leaders identified the need for establishing a cultural and spiritual center. In a daring attempt at social engineering, Chinese provincial and national authorities committed themselves to spending over \$4 billion (twice that of the Beijing Olympics sports facilities) to build a 300-square-kilometer “cultural symbolic city” in the Jiulong mountain range between the two cities of Qufu and Zoucheng, in Confucius’ home region, Shandong Province.<sup>46</sup> Designed to unite the country and its ideological, spiritual and ethnic varieties, and to attract overseas and local Chinese to yearly pilgrimages and spiritual attachment, this project seems informed by biblical and monotheistic influences along the lines of Vatican Rome and Islamic Mecca. The project to construct a spiritual center uniting the Chinese people over the world in Confucius’ hometown of Qufu would have various models, and the Jewish–Israel relationship and the model of Jerusalem, though not explicitly stated, could not have escaped the project’s visionaries.



Allegedly conceived by sixty-nine academicians in the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering in 2001 (whose names we do not have and the way it was conceived not known), it was backed by top officials including President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao and many top party and government officials. Especially active is the vice-chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. Also behind the project is the governor of Shandong, Jiang Daming. The project was approved by the National Development and Reform Commission in CPPCC National Committee in October 2007, indicating that it has the support of all the important national bodies. The initiative is trying to garner a broad constituency of Chinese support within and outside China, including a consultation panel of thirty top artists, sinologists and architects (including Chinese-American architect I.M. Pei) in China. In its aim to be broad and transparent, capturing the imagination of the Chinese people, the planning committee is soliciting ideas and designs from the public through its website and offering prizes for the best designs and contributions.

Elsewhere I illustrate the Chinese authority's penchant for visionary and ambitious programs of social engineering, the One Child Policy an example of how daring, effective and far-reaching they were willing to go.<sup>47</sup> The symbolic city project is being pitched as the next task after the Olympic Games and a glorious re-entry of Chinese culture and thought into the international arena.

In an interview with Ge Jianxiong, the director of the symbolic city project and Professor of History and Geography at Fudan University, he described the complexities inherent when initiating a project of this nature. Challenged on all sides by the issues of the role of the government in the promoting of a state religion, he first notes that the source of the symbolic city's legitimacy was in the will of the Chinese people. Ge Jianxiong noted the diverse components of the entire Chinese people represented in the Political Consultative Conference, supported its establishment in its March 2008 gathering, suggesting the willingness of the state's supreme decision-making body to nurture through state intervention a spiritual, symbolic and ritual component to Chinese national life. The practical implications of this on Beijing sovereignty would include examples such as: moving or rotating government offices from Beijing to Qufu including the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, to endow the city with trans-Chinese legitimacy; commemorating National Remembrance Day rituals; constructing a permanent national memorial "like the Panthéon in France"; building national symbols "like Arlington National Cemetery, Westminster Abbey, Red Square, Tomb of the Unknown Soldiers"; and establishing a world cultural heritage zone. Other symbolic gestures would be in glorifying Teacher's Day, where representatives of outstanding teachers or outstanding doctoral graduates celebrate and are recognized and commended by national leaders lending dignity to the Confucian education ethic.

Ge Jianxiong appears aware of many other potential models for the governance of the symbolic city, including a method of regional representation like US senators to the Senate, also a pilgrimage model Mecca-Islamic style

or Roman Catholic. He suggested that every nation has its characteristics and, underscoring his awareness of social engineering, indicated the need to tailor a suitable Chinese model. He discussed the challenges relating to representation, democratically or via groups or ethnicities, academic institutions and the representation of overseas Chinese as the next important step to address.

He observed pithy ideas such as “better to replace the visible with the invisible”, “better personal faith to mandatory rule” and “accommodating a broadly felt Chinese need to worship”. He suggested that the symbols need not be statues or icons, suggesting that a map of China serve as an accepted symbol, to which all the groups and ethnicities may be invited to provide symbolic patterns and decoration. This model calling on voluntary contributions by all groups to building the national symbol resembles the idealistic Levitical instructions for the building of the biblical tabernacle. Considering that Ge Jianxiong refers to his visit to Mount Sinai in the same interview, the likelihood that the Qufu model has biblical/monotheistic resonances is not inconceivable.<sup>48</sup>

In a series of interviews celebrating the announcement of this project in March 2008, public figures and project leaders expressed spiritual, universal, ambitious and grandiose sympathies with the project. Some of their comments are:

showcase the traditional Chinese of values like peace, harmony and ingenuity advocated by ancient philosophers such as Confucius.

commemorate the long-honored Chinese values, such as refining personal morality, cherishing peace and harmony, and filial piety. Ideally, it shall be the spiritual home for the whole nation.

should be a masterpiece of Chinese history and civilization, with a rich cultural tradition benefiting generations to come.

a Chinese gift to the whole world.

reflecting the common values and aesthetics of the Chinese, and designs containing both modern and classic characteristics.

a venue for national ceremonies, a “Symbolic city” to help revive traditional values.

contribute to China’s “soft power” and its construction should become one of the nation’s key cultural projects.

The feeling of national leaders is that China as a “leading intelligent nation” and world civilization must find a way to convey China as a “concept” and a universal symbol, rendering it intelligible to the Western nations that do not have the benefit of understanding its experiential dimensions. This is viewed as an important step in reforming the ties of overseas Chinese whose identity is gradually lost as the experiential component of Chinese identity fades. These “concepts”, however, must be gleaned from the annals of Chinese heritage, using concrete images, specific ceremony and content.

For diversity to be surmounted, an arching conceptual symbol is necessary. Ge Jianxiong argues that this is what allowed the United States to accommodate many ethnic groups and finally to eliminate racial discrimination and is what is necessary for China to unite its differences. It also allows for assimilation and adoption of new habits while still preserving the sense of continuity with the past.

Many voices also expressed opposition to the project – not a point to be dismissed in a country where debates on issues of national interest are aired under controlled supervision and the skillful choreography of the censor. In this case it seems that the party and state bodies recognized that an initiative of this nature needs to belong to the diversity of peoples and groups that comprise the nation and are easing controls so that the press, university scholars and artistic quarters are venting their thoughts and misgivings. Strong criticism is surprisingly heard in the press, with difficult challenges raised as to the constitutional right of the government to dictate the rituals and religious identification of the many minority nationalities. No doubt the negative impression and criticism was not what was hoped for by the authorities; it seems that this may be the start of an acceptable dialectic between the Chinese Communist Party and other sources of Chinese identity.

Many questions and challenges have been raised including how a city constructed in concrete and cement becomes a cultural symbol and whether this is not just a cynical attempt doomed to flop. What of the person who is given the opportunity to engineer this feat? How can it be made to play a role in the nation's spirituality and cultural identity? What type of ceremonies and rituals would be employed? Who would formulate these rituals? How to cater to different religious and ethnic rituals? How would the rituals and spirituality and culture of the fifty-six minorities in China be represented there? How would other regions in China be represented? How would overseas Chinese be represented? Given the nature of the Chinese political system, all these issues would need to be addressed and supported by the central authorities, which raises the question of the role of religion and state.

The question arises whether a state-authorized and -sponsored site could succeed in representing China, or whether this would require hundreds of years to form. Could a state condone the burning of incense to ancestor gods and superstitions, and how would it separate itself from these activities?

The most commonly aired criticism relates to the cost and potential for great waste if left in the hands of government officials; the criticism suggests that the money would be better-spent on more useful projects than on one with the likelihood of corruption behind a veil of piety. Concerns have been expressed that the site, although in Confucius' hometown, does not reflect the most meaningful events of Chinese history and culture, and that the decision did not take into account the expert opinion of historians, but was influenced by Shandong's lobbying within the national political bodies. Even scholars deeply rooted in Confucianism do not seem overly enthusiastic, citing expensive and grandiose public expression of a triumphant

Confucianism instead of intellectual and educational means characteristic of the Chinese Scholarly Tradition. The gut reaction of an undergraduate class of philosophy students (with emphasis and emotional leanings towards Chinese thought) I taught during this period was outright rejection of the project as unnecessary and a waste of money.

Following on from an earlier suggestion that Confucian culture may possess an inherent indifference to developing universal doctrinal or symbolic postures useful in transnational identity-building, pressures from the state and from overseas Chinese, together with the manifest opportunities for the proliferation of Confucianism, are edging Chinese scholars towards taking uncharted steps towards universalism and switching axis to accommodate a diversity of Chinese identities not experienced in previous centuries.

This has not stopped concurrent initiatives from making impressive progress. Government-sponsored Confucian culture has already made its impact in the form of Confucius Institutes being established around the world since 2004 to promote Chinese language and culture and support local Chinese teaching internationally, with their headquarters presently at the Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban) in Beijing. The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China estimates that, by the year 2010, there will be approximately 100 million people worldwide learning Chinese as a foreign language, and it plans to set up more than a hundred Confucius Institutes worldwide.<sup>49</sup>

Recently the state has endorsed a new term, "soft power", in its public media.<sup>50</sup> The main idea behind this new coinage is that China should not only be an economic giant in the world; it should enhance its cultural recognition as well. By spreading Confucianism, the state believes it makes the world more aware of its cultural sophistication, if not of its superiority.

The fact that the catchphrase that Chinese expansion needs to be peaceful is founded in Confucian sentiments does not always allay the fears of Western governments, which are vigilant of nationalist ideologies of Jihad or Cold War communism. The extended logic of a Chinese-government-sponsored universal Confucianism is that by submission to authority and to the emperor the Confucian conception of harmony is achievable.

A strategy of non-confrontation and a policy of harmonious development, together with China's growing economic might and the size of its internal and diasporic population, its potency as a world power, and the plausibility of a Dao De Jing-style "domination without aggression and without resistance" must seem plausible for some.

Already concerns amongst foreign governments are being expressed that the Confucius Institutes provide a platform for the Chinese government to win over Western hearts to Chinese-related agendas. Some claim that the Confucius Institutes, unlike other cultural institutes such as the British Council, Alliance Française and the Goethe Institute, operate within universities and can become a direct propaganda mouthpiece of Chinese government within educational facilities, jeopardizing their intellectual integrity.

In an extension of its traditional behavior, government-sponsored initiatives seek to export Confucianism abroad and integrate it within Western schools under the auspices and patronage of the Chinese hierarchy. In this format, it also need not undergo adaptation or transition from its national China orientation. While suiting the needs of the government, it runs contrary to New Confucian efforts (Boston Confucianism) to reconstruct Confucianism away from, independent of, simultaneously to its national Chinese context.<sup>51</sup>

Another national program launched in recent years is the training of high-achieving Chinese students to become teachers of Chinese language and culture abroad, and serve as ambassadors in universities and schools in foreign countries. The policy switch of the national authorities, and the far-reaching and methodical cultivation of cultural teachers focused on youth and students, is still very much a secular ambassadorial initiative, but none the less it contains the distinct markings, patterns and structure of missionary, evangelical, universal organizations.

Yet another initiative already mentioned is to nurture the relationship between the homeland and overseas Chinese. As part of this initiative, the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council arranges annual China tours for Outstanding Overseas Chinese People: "The objective of the events is to enhance their understanding of Chinese history and culture, to extend friendship and assistance, cooperation and exchange with Chinese people worldwide and nurture exchange between them and with China".<sup>52</sup> Most of the attendees in the 2007 tour, in which I participated, were Chinese living abroad for twenty to thirty years; most were first-generation Chinese; none was second-generation Chinese. Asked to address the forum on the subject of comparative Jewish and Chinese diasporas, I was met with initial surprise at the possibility for comparability. It seemed that Chinese do not even view themselves in a way responsible for the welfare or the survival of the homeland in the way that Jews do. The work of the office was primarily to encourage business relations and investment in Shandong, and to develop relations and to assist if possible in other areas of "friendship". The possibility that more altruistic and symbolic possibilities can grow from this remains to be seen.

Whether the model for a universal Chinese identity, expounded by traveling representatives, such as the model of the international humanitarian movements like the International Red Cross with its center in Geneva, Islam with its center in Mecca, Catholicism with its center in the Vatican, a state church like the Church of England, or the Jewish diaspora with its dual axis founded in law and in the land of Israel/Jerusalem, is hardly foreseeable. But it does seem an important reference for the Chinese Communist Party and the bodies navigating this multipronged project for the conception, construction and implementation of Chinese universalism to be linked to doctrinally based transnational models.

With Confucius Institutes in many countries highest centers of learning, a massive cadre training program promoting ambassador Chinese language and culture teachers, a broad academic exchange structure to send them

throughout the world, concurrent building of a symbolic city eventually to serve as a world headquarters – symbol and source of inspiration for Chinese culture throughout the world – the opening of reasonably free debate on the issues of Chinese identity all indicate that a structure of quintessential monotheistic proportions seems to be in progress. A dialectic of significant proportions may accompany this process encompassing a broad array of Confucian identities, a pantheon of Chinese national and diaspora views, and a reference to world religious, intellectual, cultural and political traditions.

Indeed, the Qufu project and its satellite initiatives, in their conceptual forms, present a grand, if not fantastic, vision to assemble diversity and facilitate broad dialogue amongst the schools of thought and ethnic groups that make up China, to provide an opportunity for them to germinate, cultivate and reap neo-, new and post-Confucian alternatives as well as lay down other symbolic and pragmatic foundations for the emergence of a universal Chinese identity. Qufu would be as good a place as any for Chinese to congregate, celebrate their peoplehood, contribute to an exciting dialectic between local Chinese, overseas Chinese and the world of ethnics and spiritualism and universal harmony. However, the Chinese predilection for systemicization and control would abnegate the likelihood that representatives of intellectual, religious and ideological strains, from regions of the world, would have the freedom to voice their opinions and to synthesize their thoughts, express their liberty and share their fraternity in a way that would not displease or even offend the host authorities.

### **Jewish homeland relations**

Jewish homeland relations, though relayed in theological terms in the idealistic way suggested above, are in reality more complex. Many Jews and Jewish philosophies deeply oppose the obsession with a physical or symbolic center, clearly or suggestively implying that it undermines the foundations of the Jewish people's dependence on law and doctrine as the ultimate dialectic of its existence. The Reform movement of nineteenth-century Germany emerged with one of its primary goals to break from the religious devotion towards the symbolic center of Judaism in the Holy Land; it made a different argument, but in doing so preserved the foundations and tensions inherent in the diaspora condition. The series of persecutions leading up to the Holocaust is probably one of the only reasons for the near-universal support the diverse range of Jews extend for a physical Jewish homeland. Despite this, important theories and movements still exist which deny the legitimacy of a Jewish state and the political relationship between Jews and Israel. The theoretical digression with the reality of the state of Israel as the national symbol has proved sufficient to keep a unique Jewish diaspora dialectic alive and a broad consensus oscillating between the perimeters of the dialectic, which seems to be the mechanism preventing the normalization of Jews as any other ethnic group living outside its country.



While this issue is subject to extended internal Jewish debate, none the less its principles have guided and influenced Jewish diaspora policy over thousands of years. Its genius is structuring a dialectic which engenders love, yearning and dedication towards the homeland, on one hand, while completely severing this component from religious Jewish life, on the other. In a way, Judaism achieved a separation of religion and politics millennia before liberal democracies. Judaism brought together ethnicity and a nationality, preserved the memory and idea of a political homeland alive in a mythical hyper-mystical core. Doctrine, ritual law and religious ethics were presented as the only foundations for the construction of an overseas Jewish identity. Judaism was thus able to free itself of its most explosive nationalistic baggage – the dependency and rigidity that national feelings engender and the restraints they place on intellectual and ideological creativity – while enjoying the creative tension born of it and being free to share and belong to other national and political paradigms.

It is this tension that many nations, especially Chinese, must ultimately envy as a source of its creativity, diversity and unity in one. It is this allusive and not-to-be-planned dialectic which is most valuable for Chinese immigrants as they proliferate around the world and ponder their mixed identities and loyalties and mixed feelings towards the homeland.

Ironically, one of the latest and most successful initiatives to come out of the Jewish diaspora-Israel relationship is the Birthright Program, which structurally seems to be reversing the progress achieved by the above-mentioned dialectic. Bringing Jewish philanthropists and government organizations together, it funds free trips to Israel for diaspora youth, and over the last decade of its activities has measurably transformed attitudes of tens of thousands of young Jews throughout the world.<sup>53</sup> Consciously or not, the initiative inclines towards a reintroduction of a national component into overseas Jewish identity, the dialectical implications of which are still not clear.

Its architects are already claiming it is being studied by Armenians, Irish Americans, African-Americans, even Palestinians as a model for strengthening diaspora identities. Its application within a Chinese context is equally fascinating and the possibilities far-reaching.<sup>54</sup>

The results of surveys and studies of Jewish youth and Jewish identity reveal a marked increase in the sense of belonging with the state of Israel, viewing Israel as a source of pride, renewed commitment to the Jewish people, preparedness to endow their children with a Jewish education. A component of its success was its backing from donors throughout the Jewish world, indicating that visiting Israel is being accepted amongst diaspora communities and leaders as a basic component of the Jewish life-cycle, an important rite of passage, and an integral part of Jewish identity. None the less these youth continue to view themselves as American or British or Australian Jews. In many ways this project complicates the orthodox rabbinic formula separating religious identity from political identity; at the very least, it suggests that these formulas are being revised and are in a state of transition together with the



entire Jewish–Israel axis. The increased participation of Christian youth to the program opens vistas of cooperation between Jews and Christians that have not been possible till the present and illustrates its potential for diverse appeal.

An interesting question to ponder is, if overseas Chinese youth were provided with similar programs in China, how would this affect their identity and sense of belonging to their adopted country? Can a dialectic of the type existing amongst the Jewish people be artificially constructed?

### **Mapping the dialectical axis**

The existence of a diaspora attests to the existence of a dialectic because its existence suggests that a community has formed which necessarily brings together different origins, experiences, ideas and motives into a collective and a consensus or social contract.

The stability and productivity of the diaspora are predicated on several factors such as its administration and its political fate. But over long periods of time – generations, as a mean – the most important component of a diaspora's existence is the intellectual–philosophical–spiritual–ethical dialectic, which captures the imagination of the greatest number of people and is championed by representatives, scholars, activists, radicals and dissenters; a dynamic emerges, a symbolic world which becomes a reference and a parameter to which the people refer from within or without its concentric circles.

Sometimes great intellectual constructs become platforms upon which communities, cities, nations and civilizations are founded. These constructs are composed of counterpoints and balances which are predisposed to continual reinterpretation serving as a social balancing pole and an intellectual compass to navigate complex events and a counter-weight to disperse and absorb shock encountered in the course of a group or civilization's progress. In another work I argue that monotheism is one such construct, its genius being in the fusion of the notion of divinity with the principles of justice and law.<sup>55</sup> “Would the judge of all things not do Justice?” Any expression of divinity from the time the biblical narrative described the Hebrew God would from then on be associated with justice and law. European and other Western nations still use these constructs, and even in an age of secularism and atheism the underpinnings of this intellectual paradigm still function. The dialectic between divinity and law and justice fomented intellectual movements and ideologies as diverse as the history of Western ideas.

The Chinese did not entertain monotheism in this way. This is not to say that Chinese were less effective in developing their civilization; in many periods of time they were more advanced than any Western nations. However, they were unable to provide a universal vision and were uncomfortable outside a hegemonic political structure. While the Confucian idea of *tian*, “heaven”,<sup>56</sup> could conceivably serve as an equivalent to the Hebrew concept of “divine”, providing hegemony on a transcendental level and diversity on a political level, none the less the Confucian synthesis of personal ethics,

together with the necessity and the virtue of the state, became the canvas on which all major dialectics were composed or were drawn back into. It is not that the scholarly tradition enunciated in Confucianism, in the teachings of Mencius and the classics did not have doctrinal or transcendental components. They did. It is that these were not a significant factor in the construction of Chinese society. Doctrine was inconsequential, and divinity was a secondary stage with no leverage in governance.

Even though Confucianism was continually interpreted, the primacy of the ethical-bureaucratic axis (systemic) continually permeated the dialectic.

Unlike Judaism, which underwent national exile providing ample opportunity to divest itself of governance and national politics, and to interpret monotheism away from its fusion with the laws and policies of state towards rules and morality relating to family, neighbors, community, commercial responsibility, personal and spiritual ethics, China's continuous sovereignty over millennia left little incentive to develop these optional counter-balances.

One of the main causes of China's unstable diaspora, the cause of its inability to sustain itself over several generations, is the absence of a dialectic which collects and synthesizes, and thereby includes the contribution of its younger members. The hierarchical Confucian system, which submits to authority and thereby to the elderly, naturally disenfranchises many and has few means to empower. It has little to say to or hear from those that do not speak Chinese or do not remember the name of their grandfather's village, and do not know the recipes and technique for eating dumplings or the ways to celebrate the Spring Festival. The structure of Chinese dialectics is not suitable to life abroad.

An alternative dialectic proposed by some Chinese scholars, especially the architects of "Cultural China", is the use of Western doctrinal interpretive paradigms with Confucian content. This proposed inversion of structure and content has not been achievable till the present and if pursued could yield new and dramatic formulas for Chinese identity.

While religion is freely practiced in democratic environments, advocating or suggesting loyalty to a foreign sovereign represents a profound breach of social contract. It is in this gray area that conceptually the doctrine of Confucian "heaven" and spiritual, non-national ideas are useful to neutralize real or perceived threats of an expanding Chinese nationalism.

In developing the dialectic for a non-aggressive universalism lies the most fertile area for prolific dialectic between various forces within the philosophical forums of Chinese socialism and the variant schools of Confucianism.

### **Socialism as universalism and Confucianism as particularism**

The two most dominant intellectual and social forces in China today oscillate between the Chinese Communist Party's brand of socialism and traditional Chinese Confucian thought. These are showing signs of merging and systemizing as described above. But in one area there are also signs of divergence and dialectical tension. Chinese socialism, imported from

Europe, contains strong universal undercurrents which run against the grain of traditional Chinese thought, which historically despised imperialism and referred to colonialists as barbarians. The insularity and introversion bred in Confucian statecraft made the prospects of developing a Chinese political worldview almost surreal.

Ironically, Chinese communists inherited a universal and almost evangelical ambition to disseminate their worldview, an imbedded doctrine of revolutionary socialism. Perhaps the traces of Confucian influence had curtailed the ambitions of the more radical Chinese socialists, cautioning them against participating in the expansionist adventures of Russian communism. Perhaps the alternative to expansionism was China's self-imposed isolationism.

Over a generation of ideological evolution at the highest echelons of the Chinese Communist Party schools, Chinese socialism has still not entirely rejected the tenets of universal ideology. The necessities of modern life, the global village, the need for diplomacy, and the call by the Chinese population to take its rightful role in the pantheon of great nations and stake its claim as a world power caused the Chinese Communist Party to mine its socialist ideology for a platform to extend itself abroad. Lacking a tradition within Confucianism to undertake this radical step, the CCP had little option other than to reject systemicization in this specific respect and to stand defiant against the core of Confucian thinking, to develop a Chinese vision of the periphery and the world outside the Middle Kingdom. The tension between these two axes, born out of the necessities of modernity, may become the source of a fruitful dialectic between socialism and Confucianism.

In this respect, despite the process of systemicization it has undergone in other respects, it most clearly distinguishes itself from Confucianism. Chinese socialism has set out to develop an entire philosophical worldview including policy on the environment and sustainability, harmonious governance, even addressing the obligations of a socialist in personal ethnics. Being a political ideology, its ability to expand and proliferate these are limited, and the need to align with an ethnical philosophy such as Confucianism quickly became apparent.

The fusion of a universal ideology with the particularism and the hierarchicism of Systemic China and its form of introverted nationalism can synthesize to produce a number of curious hybrid ideologies.

In an unusual turn of events, the Chinese Communist Party, which tried for over fifty years to rid the country of its intellectual and cultural influence, is now championing the Confucian right to be represented as a religio-ethical philosophy in the furthest countries and regions of the world. The intellectual reconciliation of the party with Confucianism is remarkable considering the history of antagonism towards what was considered an anachronism and a superstition. Today it binds itself with Confucianism, understanding the necessary tension it must sustain for its universal ambitions to be realized.<sup>57</sup>

Re-examining its position in the world and observing the negative effects of a nation without a spirituality or traditional ethic drawing from the depth

of its history, perplexed by the disintegration of ethical standards accompanying its rapid economic growth, the absence of tradition has begun to be bemoaned in many quarters. The contemporary Chinese Communist Party is increasingly recognizing the need to integrate itself with an ethic and in historical Chinese symbols requiring the complicity of a major Chinese cultural body to achieve this. Although Buddhism and Daoism may just as easily contribute to the dialectic, none the less Confucianism seems to be the party's choice for power-sharing, underscoring the sense of familiarity and sympathy party leaders have for it. The Academy of Social Sciences and the Central Party Schools and university scholars are initiating scores of studies and explorations of areas of fusion and ways to expand and enhance Chinese identity into the twenty-first century.

The composition of supporters and opposers of the symbolic city project, for example, suggests some interesting patterns. On the one hand, Chinese students and scholars with sympathies for Confucianism express skepticism of a project which would enhance the profile of their philosophical worldview; on the other hand, the Chinese Communist Party and its multitude of government bodies, the traditional enemy of Confucianism, support it and see it as an important component in the development of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" or, in other words, integrating traditional Chinese culture into the Communist Party and ensuring its role as a long-term fixture of Chinese identity.

In this specific instance, Confucianism is being grafted on to socialist doctrine as opposed to the opposite where socialism is being grafted into Confucianism and systemized. This event may be unique and offers a kernel of hope for a more balanced dialectic between a foreign ideology and the over-powerful systemization abilities inherent in Confucianism.

The Chinese socialist identity is of great theoretical interest to the development of a new Chinese identity. Although few overseas Chinese are socialist – to the contrary, they despise socialism – none the less it has already fomented several strains and fusions of Chinese and universal identity; and no doubt, with the efforts invested by the Chinese Communist Party to endow socialist theory with as many instruments of modernity as possible to ensure its survival, it will continue to evolve its worldview and expand its horizons, and continue to seek integration and synthesis between its tenets and every conceivable body of knowledge and philosophy.<sup>58</sup>

It is conceivable that the ability to form a universalism may have other effects in neutralizing the sense of bitterness Chinese have for foreign influence and their perceived need to sinicize and systematize to compensate for a lack of other influence over internal and international affairs. As Chinese universalism grows, Chinese authorities may feel more at ease to concede to foreign influence as mutuality and interdependence become the platform on an equal dialectical playing field between nations. This dynamic therefore opens the way for one of the most meaningful dialectics that Chinese civilization has had since the golden age of the Tang Dynasty, if ever.

The attempt to synthesize the universalism of socialism with Confucianism has fascinating implications. The most problematic question is what aspects of Confucianism should be chosen to form this synthesis – its ethical, behavioral, emotional, self-disciplinary foundations, or its administrative, structural, systemicizing components? The choice of one over the other may be the difference between a healthy and constructive dialectic, with positive universal applications, or a threatening, aggressive and over-powerful system the ability to dominate and systemicize its diaspora communities and institutions throughout the world. A universal Confucianism in a format under the dominion of the CCP could have catastrophic repercussions, which few outside a few Chinese Neo-Marxist visionaries would care to consider in this quarter of the century.

Profound consideration must be given to the construction of a dialectic which achieves the right balance between the needs of the Chinese people, the needs of overseas Chinese diasporas and the balance between this and fears that nations have for a change in the balance of cultural power.

### **Lessons from Jewish dialectics**

Accused of world dominion, the source of this perception was not in numbers, or in military power, but in the subtle reverberations achieved by a remarkable Jewish dialectic which keeps together, though in creative tension, many diverse and even opposing wings of an eclectic civilization.

One of the major contributions to the Jewish dialectic (if we can speak of it as such) is the role of messianism. Already known as a phenomenon in its own right, messianism is composed of a complex set of dialectics which compete and struggle with one another and have their roots in the explosive tension between Jewish universalism and Jewish particularism which has expressed itself and been tested in the crucible of Jewish history.<sup>59</sup> This tension has produced countless political, religious, intellectual, social, literary and scientific movements; its creativity is testament to its intellectual fertility. Tumultuous as these periods of Jewish history may have been, they were also recognized for remarkable cultural by-products and, for the most part, were passive, non-aggressive and non-threatening to host nations and have been interpreted by later generations as having benefited humanity. If a universal-particular tension of this nature is achievable within a Chinese context, the oscillating wings of a trans-Chinese dialectic may yet produce significant intellectual output for the benefit of universalism.

China rarely witnessed messianic outbreaks, almost antithetical to the Confucian structure, heretical to its orthodoxy of non-challenge to the fundamentals of authority; the circumstances in which Chinese messianic outbreaks did occur deserve more study as to how they occurred and what resulted from them and how and if they were able to break the hold of the inherent hierarchy, for how long, and how did these movements subside.

Another of the quintessential dialectics of the Jewish people, which made its way into the consciousness of Western civilization, was founded on the biblical construct of monotheism. One of its most important qualities was the ability of its adherents to traverse class, political wings and social ideologies, and transcend and descend within hierarchical systems, while owing to the universal legal-ethical dimensions it was able to embrace diversity spanning race, territory, nationalism and a host of sub-ideologies and emotions. Attempts by Chinese Christians to use monotheism as a medium to develop a universal Chinese identity are legitimate and will invariably bear results. Chinese Islam may also make inroads if alternatives are not found over the next century.

## Notes

- 1 Tu Wei-ming, "Cultural China: the periphery as the centre", *Daedalus*, 134 (4): 145–67.
- 2 Personal correspondence.
- 3 Tu Wei-ming, "Cultural China: the periphery as the center".
- 4 I have lectured on the messianic universalism inherent in Marxian thought and argued that Jewish society in Enlightenment Germany was fomenting a specific personality type which would be torn between Jewish particularism and universalism. In this respect the circumstances of the Marx family and Marxian responses are typical of the Jewish German predicament.
- 5 Julius Carlebach, *Karl Marx and the Radical Critique of Judaism* (London: Routledge, 1970); and Wang Zhijun, "Jewish sources to Karl Marx's thought", doctoral thesis submitted to Heilongjiang University, Harbin, 2008.
- 6 Jeremiah, 29: 7.
- 7 Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Ketubot 111a.
- 8 The US Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was not repealed until 1943. Until then there was very limited Chinese immigration into the US. The quota was 105 people per year.
- 9 Tu Wei-ming, "Cultural China: the periphery as the center".
- 10 Wang Gungwu, *The Chinese Overseas: From Earthbound China to the Quest for Autonomy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).
- 11 Tu Wei-ming, "Cultural China: the periphery as the centre".
- 12 This statement reflects my understanding of the modern Jewish diaspora and the way it differs from the Chinese community, it needs to be qualified in greater detail and comparison, which I hope to do in forthcoming papers.
- 13 I discuss Chinese and Jewish conceptions of charity elsewhere in the text.
- 14 For extensive reading on this subject, see Avrum Ehrlich (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Jewish Diaspora* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC CLIO, 2008).
- 15 See: <http://www.c-c-c.org/chineseculture/minority/minority.html>. Also White Paper – Freedom of Religious Belief in China, <http://www.c-c-c.org/chineseculture/minority/minority.html>. Also <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/zt/zjxy/t36492.htm>.
- 16 These deities evolved, originally being venerable ancestors who, respected and referred to by their descendants in times of need, finally took on godlike proportions. Examples include: 观音, Guanyin (or goddess of mercy), the deity commonly referred to if a woman wants to have a child; 龙王, Longwang (or dragon king), the deity commonly referred to by farmers for rain; 文曲星, Wenquxing, the deity commonly referred to by students wishing for success or to enter a better school or position.



- 17 It has long been noticed that in Chinese culture a desire to associate is lacking. Ling Shuming, whom Guy Salvatore Alitto called the last Confucian, observed that "Facing the challenges to modernize China, the most severe problem was the lack of techniques (form, customs and ideals) to associate". In this regard he shares the view of Dr Sun Yatsen, the founding father of the Republic of Modern China, in the criticism that Chinese are disunited "like sands without something to bring them together".
- 18 In another work I discuss this same phenomenon to argue how Judaism, possessing an almost polar opposite structure to its scholarly classes, could be of value to the reconstruction of neo-Confucianism.
- 19 See "systemic", *Webster's Dictionary*.
- 20 "夷狄之有君，不如諸夏之亡也"
- 21 "吾聞用夏變夷者，未聞變于夷者"
- 22 A question of related interest is the rate and method of conversion to Islam of Han Chinese immigrants to Muslim countries. This may indicate other dimensions of Chinese Islamic synthesis and is another area of useful investigation.
- 23 See Jonathan Lipman, "Living Judaism in Confucian culture: being Jewish and being Chinese", in Lawrence Fine (ed.), *Judaism in Practice: From the Middle Ages through the Modern Period* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), for a translation of the Kaifeng Stele.
- 24 jùyǒu zhōngguó tèsè de shèhuìzhǔyì 具有中国特色的社会主义. On 25 October 1987, this concept, "The Theory to Build Socialism with Chinese Characteristics", was first written in the report of the 13th Conference of Chinese Communist Party and spoken by Deng Xiaoping, then reiterated in 1989 by Jiang Zemin.
- 25 Ray Huang, *1587, a Year of No Significance: The Ming Dynasty in Decline* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981).
- 26 See Tu Wei-ming, "Cultural China: the periphery as the centre".
- 27 Shown in the 1980s and becoming extremely controversial; credited with fomenting the Tiananmen Square Massacre, Su became a wanted man and went into exile.
- 28 Pinyin: *zhongti xiyong*.
- 29 Tu Wei-ming, "Cultural China: the periphery as the centre".
- 30 *bǎirì wéixīn* 百日维新.
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- 40 See, for example, David Straub, "Adopted Chinese children into Jewish families", in Ehrlich (ed.), *The Jewish-Chinese Nexus*.
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- 55 See Avrum Ehrlich, *God, Messiah and Heresy* (forthcoming).
- 56 *tian* 天 or 天堂.
- 57 The Nationalists on the other hand supported Confucianism. Chiang Kai-shek was a student of Wang Yangming (王阳明 1472–1528), a neo-Confucianist in the Ming Dynasty; though officially he was a Christian, he became famous for his spiritual interpretation of Confucius.
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# Comprehensive bibliography of Jewish-related books, articles and blogs in the Chinese language

## Introduction

The following is close to a complete list of books and articles written or translated into Chinese on Jewish-related subjects. The publication of books on Jewish subjects has gone through several stages over the past seventy years. Over the past decade there has been a considerable popular interest in Jewish money, power and political influence, and books have been published which in other countries would represent gross generalizations and distortions, and border on anti-Semitism.

The choice of books to be translated or written reveals the interests of the Chinese reader. The types of people writing, the standard of writing and translation, and the quality of the writing all testify to the expectations and standards presently existing in China. The titles rendered below are as they were used in the books; I have presented them without correcting grammar as this also indicates the carelessness with which they have been composed.

Over the last five years a larger number of academic books on Jewish philosophy, thought, religion and history have been published, and they are being followed by works of literature, from American Jewish writers to Israeli writers. Many of these have not been included as they are already too numerous.

One of the scholars who has been studying the patterns and impact of the publication of Jewish works in China is Professor Fu Xiaowei, who compiled some of these lists and has kindly shared them with me, and whose research on the subject of Jewish literature in China will only become more important. Another scholar who has surveyed Jewish-related information on websites and blogs is Professor Zhang Ping of Tel Aviv University (“Israel and the Jewish people on Chinese cyberspace since 2002”, in Avrum Ehrlich [ed.], *The Jewish-Chinese Nexus: A Meeting of Civilizations*, Routledge, 2008).

As Jewish Studies continues to grow in China, and scholars and intellectuals increasingly find relevance in Jewish-related fields, this list will grow. It is important none the less to identify its progress thus far and to let future generations see where and how it will develop.

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